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ABSTRACT

A study explored how 10 Tennessee adult literacy students define the meaning and outcomes of their participation in adult education programs in the context of their lives. The primary source of data was the extended recorded conversations about participants' lives before and after enrollment in adult literacy programs. Interviews, usually conducted in participants' homes, covered their adult education experiences, family and work lives, childhoods and earlier schooling, and the changes in their lives that they attributed to adult education participation. Findings indicated all participants had been employed; only one was currently dependent on public assistance; and all nine who had children reported being involved in their children's education. Nine participants reported acquiring new literacy skills; for eight, these new skills in reading, writing, and computation led to changes in the ways they use literacy in their lives. Changes were in the practical everyday activities; increased access to and understanding of expository text; and more extensive reading. Participants described positive changes in their sense of self, a strong sense of accomplishment, and a new and stronger voice or new opportunities to express themselves. (Appendixes include interview protocols, and participant profiles.) (Contains 68 references.) (YLB)

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National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

"I'VE COME A LONG WAY:" LEARNER-IDENTIFIED OUTCOMES OF PARTICIPATION IN ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMS

by

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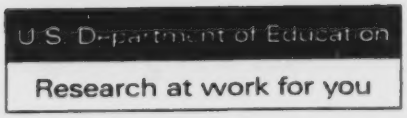

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While this study could not have happened without the help and support of many people, the work, conclusions, and any errors are our own.

Executive summary

The Learner Identified Outcomes study brings learners' perspectives to the ongoing research conversation on outcomes of participation in adult literacy education. The study used a life history methodology to build an understanding of these outcomes on the lives of adult learners. The ten participants were selected from participants of the earlier Tennessee Longitudinal Study of Adult Literacy Participants. This small sample was constructed to be as representative demographically of the Tennessee ABE population as possible.

The outcomes of participation in literacy classes described by the adults in this study went far beyond new skills or educational gains. This research implies that policy makers should take into account all the reasons people want adult basic education as they develop systems of performance accountability. Many of the approaches now being developed do not measure the primary outcomes reported by the participants in this study: new literacy practices and more positive sense of self. To assess these outcomes may require developing performance-based measures that allow for the interaction of skill, task, and context that seem to define outcomes in real life. A study conducted with a national sample in greater depth than previous research may be needed to understand the outcomes of adult literacy programs.

The primary source of data for this study was extended recorded conversations with the ten participants about their lives before and after enrollment in adult literacy programs. The interviews, usually conducted in participants' homes, covered their adult education experiences, their family and work lives, their childhoods and earlier schooling, and the changes in their lives that they attributed to adult education participation.

The data from the interviews were analyzed using an inductive iterative process. We noted both particular stories and common themes and categories. The broad categories that cut across all interviews were, to some extent, determined by the questions asked, e.g. work, adult education, early schooling, and family. We also identified themes that emerged from the interviews that cut across categories, e.g. value of education, impact of poverty and race on education, literacy practices, and sense of self.

This study explored the lives of these ten adults as well as their definitions of outcomes of participation in adult basic education. Their lives established the contexts for the outcomes. All of the participants had been employed, many at the same job for many years. Only one person was currently dependent on public assistance. Nine of the participants had children, and all

reported being involved in their children's education. Of their 18 adult children, all but one completed high school and eight had attended college. Eight of their children are still in school. Many of these people had already met the goals of WIA (Workforce Investment Act) for self-sufficiency and partnership in their children's education before they enrolled in adult literacy programs.

However, their participation in adult basic education was important to them (four had re-enrolled when interviewed) and led to positive changes in their lives. Study participants attributed a variety of changes in their lives to their participation in adult literacy education. Some of the adults in this study did report outcomes that correspond to the goals of WIA. Two of them passed the GED test. Of the seven who had employment as a goal, four were employed when interviewed. However, they reported other changes that were particular to the individuals and the contexts of their lives. These were the changes that seemed to make the most difference in their lives, and are grouped here as literacy uses and changes in sense of self.

Literacy Uses

Nine of the participants reported acquiring new literacy skills from their participation in adult literacy programs. For eight these new skills in reading, writing, and computation led to changes in the ways they use literacy in their lives. Some of the changes were in the practical everyday activities of peoples' lives:

> *Fix my own money order out. I fill all my own money order and everything.*

> *And also the adult classes taught me how to read a map. I learned how to find myself around here in town with the little yellow map book when I had to go out and look for apartments.*

Some were able to carry out work functions more easily:

> *But while I went down there, [to class] it really made a difference, you know, like on where I work now, I fill out, you've got to fill out your tickets on what you run, you got to keep the account on it, you've got to go through all this and fill it out, date it and what it is and all that. And it's helped me on all of that.*

While most of those with children had already been involved in their children's education, new literacy skills expanded this involvement for some:

My little grandbaby now, I've learned so many things that I try to teach him a lot of things that I could not teach him when he first came to us.

In addition to the new uses of literacy in carrying out the activities of their lives, the participants also described increased access to and understanding of expository text. Five people talked about the more extensive reading they now do and how that reading has expanded their understanding of the world or themselves.

You see, the news talks about what's going on overseas and stuff. You [I] read the book, and I can understand what's going on over there now. Before, I didn't know. I thought, well, that's just news, something to report, that's it. Then after I read the book and learned how this become, I understood more. I was, "OK, now this is how this ended up at." I'd be walking in there to get something, and something about overseas happen [on television]. I'd stop and come back in here. "Wait a minute now, I've got to catch this." Grow interested now. I understand more now.

Some of the changes in literacy uses that were reported by the adults in this study included new uses, for example Elizabeth's ability to purchase her own money orders. Others were better able to carry out activities such as completing job reports that they had previously found troublesome. For several, reading became an activity that is a part of their life instead of a tool that is used with difficulty. Will, for example, went from occasionally glancing at newspapers to reading them as "an every night thing." Changes in literacy uses are related to changes in people's lives, changes that expand what they are able to do, what they are concerned with, and how they feel about themselves.

Sense of self

The adults in this study are in many ways ordinary adults: they have had jobs, have raised families, are involved in community activities. They are people who are resilient and who have a strong sense of their own abilities, their self-efficacy. Even so, these adults also described positive changes in their sense of self that they attributed to their participation in adult literacy programs. Three participants talked about losing their sense of shame at being in a literacy class:

And I was shamed, that's another thing. I couldn't see myself going to class, grown man, fifty years old almost, sitting up in class. And just was embarrassing to me. But after I started and I seen more than just me sitting there, some people were sixty and seventy years old, I said, "Why should I be ashamed? There's some people older than I am." And, hey, I got more into it.

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Four of the participants, the two who passed the GED test and the two who reported the most limited reading skills at enrollment, expressed a strong sense of accomplishment.

> *It made a whole lot of difference how I feel about myself because I feel better about myself since I learned how to read better. I feel like I'm somebody. You feel better... when you learn how to do a lot of things for yourself you know.*

> *Four times and I finally, finally done it. [passed the GED]. And it was all kinds of certificates. I got them all on my wall, you know, and I keep looking at them and think, "Well, I did that."*

A new and stronger voice or new opportunities to express themselves were reported by three participants as one of them described:

> *And also about speaking up. I can do this better now. Like recently, at my work, I was scheduled to have a vacation for Christmas. And then my supervisor comes to me and says that this other woman will get the Christmas week off, not me. And I was already scheduled, and she even had less seniority. So I spoke up. I said, "No, it isn't right. I want my vacation." And I got it. And before I was so shy.*

New literacy uses and sense of self often seemed to intersect. These literacy practices were often important because of the social situations in which they occurred. So, for example, Marvin had always met with his friends and talked about events; but now he can use the knowledge that he has gained from reading the newspapers in these conversations. It is not that Marvin "had low self-esteem" before; but now he feels differently because of his improved literacy abilities. He has read articles in the paper that his friends have read and *"so we can discuss this matter."* June felt confident enough to take a job in a nursing home kitchen where she is not only able to read the labels on trays, but has started an informal ESOL program teaching new words to a fellow employee.

We have drawn two main conclusions from this study. First, we found the adults in this study were for the most part, resilient, self-reliant people who valued education. Second, we found that the outcomes of literacy program participation in learners' lives are diverse, often complex, and determined by individuals' life situations.

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Introduction

As they live their lives, adults encounter challenges, have dreams, and make decisions to take actions that they hope will change their lives for the better. One of the actions many adults take is to seek additional education. They enroll in classes hoping that their educational experiences will lead to positive outcomes in their lives. This is certainly true for the people who enroll in adult basic education programs.

Practitioners and funders of adult basic education, too, are concerned about outcomes. The field of adult basic education is struggling to identify and document the outcomes of adult literacy programs. The 1998 Workforce Investment Act requires federally-funded providers of adult basic education to establish a comprehensive performance accountability system. A National Reporting System for Adult Education has been developed under the direction of the Division of Adult Education and Literacy of the Department of Education. Many states have their own systems to collect information on outcomes from practitioners in local programs.

The purpose of this study is to add learner perspectives to the discussions in the field of adult basic education about assessment of outcomes. This study explores how ten Tennessee adult literacy students define the meaning and outcomes of their participation in adult education programs in the context of their lives. By "outcomes", we mean changes in people's lives, in what they do and how they feel, "changes that take place in learners as a result of their participation in adult literacy education" (Beder, 1999, p. 8). What a group of adult learners say about the differences literacy programs made in their lives can inform efforts to define and document outcomes of adult basic education on a local, state, and national level.

In this report we discuss outcomes, and we discuss lives. Open-ended interviews with the participants about their lives, including their experiences in adult literacy programs, are the primary source of data. The interviews were taped, transcribed, and analyzed using an iterative inductive process. From these interviews we heard stories of people's lives growing up, working, and raising their families, as well as dealing with limited education. They talked about ways their lives had changed since their participation in adult education, both externally, in things they were able to do using new literacy practices, and internally, in their sense of themselves. While these changes were not often dramatic, in every instance study participants identified valued outcomes.

The study participants told stories of hard times, of survival, of trying to ensure better lives for their children. These are issues present in the lives of most people, but were accentuated for these people by their lack of literacy skills or educational credentials. What participants said echoes some of what other research has established about reasons for participation, about barriers: about gains in skills and self-esteem (see, for example, Sticht & Armstrong, 1994; Quigley, 1997; Beder, 1999; Comings, Parrella, & Soricone, 2000). But they also challenge some of the assumptions of many in the adult education community. This study found ten adults who came to adult education having held jobs, often for many years. They are resilient people who for the most part have a strong sense of their own worth and abilities. As parents they have raised children who, instead of exhibiting a pattern of "intergenerational illiteracy", have succeeded in secondary and post-secondary education.

These narratives of lives and changes led us to a clearer, but more complex, understanding of the ways in which participation in adult literacy programs have an impact on people's lives. The positive outcomes of participation that these learners identified were determined individually and were affected by their goals, but also by the varying contexts of their lives. What one person identified as an important outcome may have been part of another person's life for years. What one person hoped to accomplish may have meant nothing to another learner. The goals people brought to adult education and the ways that the outcomes of adult education played out in their lives were contingent upon and to a large extent determined by social, cultural, political and economic factors. Where they lived, when they grew up, their race and gender all impacted the kinds of outcomes of adult education that they hoped for and the kinds of changes that they have experienced. These ten adults have shared with us a more complex and more real perspective on adult education outcomes than the educational levels and economic outcomes that have often been the focus of adult education.

Structure of This Report

In this report we want to give the reader a full sense of how the participants in the study make meaning of their lives and particularly the impact of participation in adult literacy programs on their lives. Quotes are used extensively ~~as examples of particular findings~~, because this ~~study~~ is ~~based on~~ the narratives of the participants, and their words in effect are the findings. Quotes are attributed and are as transcribed except for eliminating repetitive pause phrases, such as "you know" and "uh". If a quote is from two or more different

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moments in our conversation, we have put a hard return at the end of each piece. Ellipses (.....) indicate a pause or break made by the speaker. A line (_____) indicates that we deliberately left out a word that might identify a person or place or that we could not understand on the recording.

The rest of the Introduction situates this study. We review studies on outcomes of adult basic education and studies of adult literacy learners' lives. Section 2 discusses the methodology of this study. The major portion of the report, Sections 3 through 8, presents the ways that the participants described their lives and their participation in adult literacy programs, and the ways this participation did or did not impact their lives. We have included detail on many aspects of the participants' lives because outcomes occur in the context of everyday life, and everyday life creates the need for and constrains literacy practices and the impact of changed literacy practices.

Section 3 briefly introduces the context of Tennessee and introduces the ten participants. Profiles of each participant are in Appendix 3. Section 4 presents the experience of adult basic education as the participants described it, including their reasons for participation, the teachers they encountered, and the program methods and materials used. Section 5 is a description of the lives of the participants: their neighborhoods, their childhood and early schooling, their families, their everyday activities. Section 6 focuses on the work lives of the participants, how they learned their work, and how they have gained employment. Section 7 examines the literacy practices of the participants and how these practices have changed. Section 8 looks at participants' sense of themselves and how that self concept has changed. The final Section re-examines the outcomes found and not found and the implications for the field of adult basic education.

Situating This Study in Research on Outcomes

This study grew out of an earlier longitudinal study in which baseline and annual follow-up interviews were conducted with people who enrolled in Level 1 ABE classes in nine Tennessee programs from 1992-1994. While that study has given us some valuable findings (see Merrifield, Smith, Rea and Shriver, 1993; Merrifield, Smith, Rea, and Crosse, 1994; Bingman, Ebert, and Smith, 1999) we believe the addition of learners' experiences and perspectives as they report them gives us a deeper understanding of learners' lives and the outcomes of participation in adult literacy programs.

This current study is a part of the work of the National Center for the

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Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) focusing on the assessment of outcomes of participation in adult basic education (programs teaching basic academic and other skills and preparing adults for the General Educational Development test.) NCSALL's assessment work is in turn part of national and international attempts to determine measures of performance in education (see Merrifield, 1998). Attempts to measure the outcomes of adult basic education have not met the needs of the field and have often been flawed in various ways (Beder, 1999). Current efforts to build a better system include a National Reporting System for Adult Education, which attempts to "establish a uniform national data base" (Condelli, 1999) from standardized measures of academic skills and the much more ambitious and inclusive work of the Equipped for the Future project, which is developing a framework of performance standards that will enable the alignment of instruction, assessment and reporting in adult basic education (Stein, 1999). NCSALL's work on assessment of outcomes has included policy papers reviewing performance accountability (Merrifield, 1998) and previous outcomes studies (Beder, 1999), a review of quality of life measurement in other fields, work with local programs to develop processes to document outcomes, and this study of how learners define the outcomes of their participation.

Most of the research related to the outcomes of participation has been quantitative (see reports by Tracy-Mumford, 1995, and Beder, 1999, for examples). However, a number of researchers (Rockhill, 1982; Warren, 1982) have suggested the appropriateness and meaningfulness of qualitative methods in adult education, and there is a growing body of qualitative work looking at impacts in learners' lives. Three major evaluations of adult literacy programs took a qualitative approach. Fingeret, et al (1991), and Gaber-Katz and Watson (1991) conducted interviews with adult learners as part of program evaluations in Vancouver, New York City, and Toronto.

Other qualitative studies of people with limited traditional literacy skills did not look directly at outcomes. Kassam (1977), Martin (1984), and Denny, (1992) used qualitative methods to explore various issues in the lives of literacy learners. Fingeret (1982), Neilsen (1989), Barton and Hamilton (1998) and Merrifield, Bingman, Hemphill, and deMarrais (1997) examined the uses or practices of literacy in adults' lives. Work by Heath (1983), Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988), Auerbach (1989), and Weinstein-Shr (1995) examine literacy interactions in families. Hull (1991), Gowen (1992), and Hart-Landsberg and Reder (1997) among others have used qualitative methods to provide a critical look at the literacy demands of work. Work by Purcell-Gates (1995), Horsman

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(1990), Fingeret and Drennon (1997), and Belzer (1998) focuses on the experiences of adults as literacy students.

Our study builds on this rich work by assessing the perspective on ten adults who have all been students in adult literacy classes and who are reflecting on the impact of their literacy class participation on their lives a few years later.

Clarification of Definitions

One of the theoretical issues we needed to clarify for this study was our interpretation of the meaning of *literacy*. Changes in literacy of adult learners are commonly described as changes in literacy skill levels. This is the language used in the new federal Workforce Investment Act (1998). The implication is that people's literacy is getting "better." This approach to literacy has been described by Brian Street (1984) as the "autonomous" approach to literacy. The autonomous approach assumes that literacy can be separated from the social context, or can be "acquired" and measured as a decontextualized skill. Street proposes an alternate "ideological" approach, an approach proposing that the meaning of literacy varies from situation to situation and is tied to social relationships, including power relationships. Instead of literacy being a decontextualized skill, it is a social practice.

David Barton (1994) writes about an integrated view of literacy, in which "Literacy is a social activity and can best be described in terms of the literacy practices which people draw upon in literacy events"(p. 34). People have different literacies that they use in different domains of life. Literacy events are the particular activities where literacy has a role:

> Literacy practices are general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives. In the simplest sense literacy practices are what people do with literacy. However, practices are not observable units of behavior since they also involve values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p.6).

Lytle and Wolfe (1989) define literacy practices as the application of literacy skills to accomplish tasks in real life contexts. Hart-Landsberg and Reder (1997) write of literacy as a cultural practice rather than a portable generic individual skill. In this study we have used *literacy* to mean uses of reading and writing embedded in the contexts of people's lives.

Another theoretical dilemma had to do with *self-esteem*. Improved self-esteem is often found as an outcome of adult basic education (Beder, 1999). However, what is meant by self-esteem beyond "feeling better about oneself" is often not clarified. Fingeret and Drennon (1997) refer to *self-concept* as defined by Sanford and Donovan (1984) as "one's overall set of beliefs and images about oneself" (Fingeret and Drennon, p. 70) and following Foster (1989) speculate that an adult might have a positive overall self-concept and still feel low self-esteem in regards to schooling or literacy use. As we analyzed our data in a category we first called "self", we found Bandura's work on self-efficacy, ("people's beliefs in their capabilities to exercise control over their level of functioning and environmental demands") (Bandura, Barbarinelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli, 1996, p. 1206) and Valliant's (1994) work on resilience to be helpful in understanding the sense of self as perceived and expressed by the participants (see Section 7).

Section 2: Methodology

Life history interviewing is a method for collecting and analyzing data about the outcomes of participation of literacy programs on participants' lives. For the purposes of our research, life history methodology enabled us to put participants' literacy practices and experiences in adult education programs in the context of their everyday lives and provided us with means for letting their voices be heard, their feelings and values be expressed. We believe that without presenting this complex picture of domains, relationships, and images constituting reality for these ten people, the true meaning of literacy and learning in their lives would remain incomplete.

The qualitative research method employed in this study has been defined by Polkinghorne (1995) as "analysis of narratives, that is, studies whose data consist of narratives or stories but whose analysis produces paradigmatic typologies or categories" (p. 5). Analysis of narratives is one of the most frequently used methods for interpreting data in qualitative research.

According to Bloom and Munro (1995), life history narratives "are particularly rich sources because, attentively interpreted, they illuminate both the logic of individual courses of action and the effects of system-level constraints within which those courses evolve" (p. 100). As described by Mishler (1986), our approach "blends qualities of life-history and focused interviewing. ...[It] encompasses much more of a person's life than a narrowly specified particular situation experienced by all ... respondents. Nonetheless, ... attention is centered, or focused, primarily on a general 'situation' that they have in common" (p. 99). In our case, this "situation" included the participants' experiences related to literacy practices before, during, and after their enrollment in literacy programs.

Choosing Sample

We chose our sample from the adults interviewed for the Tennessee Longitudinal Study. The participants in the longitudinal study had been chosen to be representative of adult learners in Tennessee, and we had access to data about their participation in adult education as well as to structured interviews they had given as part of the longitudinal study. While this qualitative study stands alone, it adds richness to analyses of the longitudinal study, and those analyses provide a larger context for the qualitative study.

In the course of the Tennessee Longitudinal Study, 450 people were interviewed when they first enrolled in adult basic education programs in three consecutive academic years: 1991-92, 1992-93, and 1993-94. They were from nine programs across the state chosen from counties determined to be representative of other counties in their area. All of those surveyed scored below 5.9 on the Reading section of the ABLE (Adult Basic Learning Exam). In 1993, 1994, and 1995 follow-up surveys were administered to those participants who had agreed initially to follow-up interviews and who could be located. In 1995, 139 people from all the three cohorts were interviewed. We focused on these 139 since they were those for whom we had most recent information.

From the 139 people, we selected for our sample those participants who had received at least 80 hours of instruction. The choice of 80 hours was based on a search of adult education research literature (Sticht & Armstrong, 1994; Young et al, 1995) and various policy documents (Condelli, 1994) that focused on differences between long- and short-stayers and on the number of hours after which different programs administered literacy post-tests. Our question was also posted on the National Literacy Alliance listserv, addressing experienced researchers and practitioners in the field of adult literacy. Based on these sources, we chose to use 80 hours of participation in ABE (classified as "substantial participation rate" by Merrifield, Smith, Rea, and Crosse, 1994) as a criterion for narrowing the initial sample. At this level of participation, we believe learner outcomes-including changes in literacy skills and practices-can reasonably be expected.

Across the three cohorts, thirty-six people interviewed in 1995 had at least 80 hours of participation. Several attempts were made to contact these thirty-six by phone and solicit their agreement to participate in the qualitative study. A total of twenty-three participants were located and agreed to be interviewed. Out of the twenty-three, we selected our final sample of ten people because they are as demographically representative as possible of the Tennessee population of ABE students and are from both urban and rural areas in the three sections (East, Middle and West) of the state. Our sample includes four white women, two black women, two white men and two black men. The two black women, one white woman and one black man live in urban areas and the rest live in small towns or rural areas. Three participants are from East Tennessee, three from Middle Tennessee, and four from West Tennessee. Our age strata did not quite correspond to that of the Tennessee ABE. For example, we did not have any participants in the 16-24 age range; this can be partially explained by the longitudinal nature of

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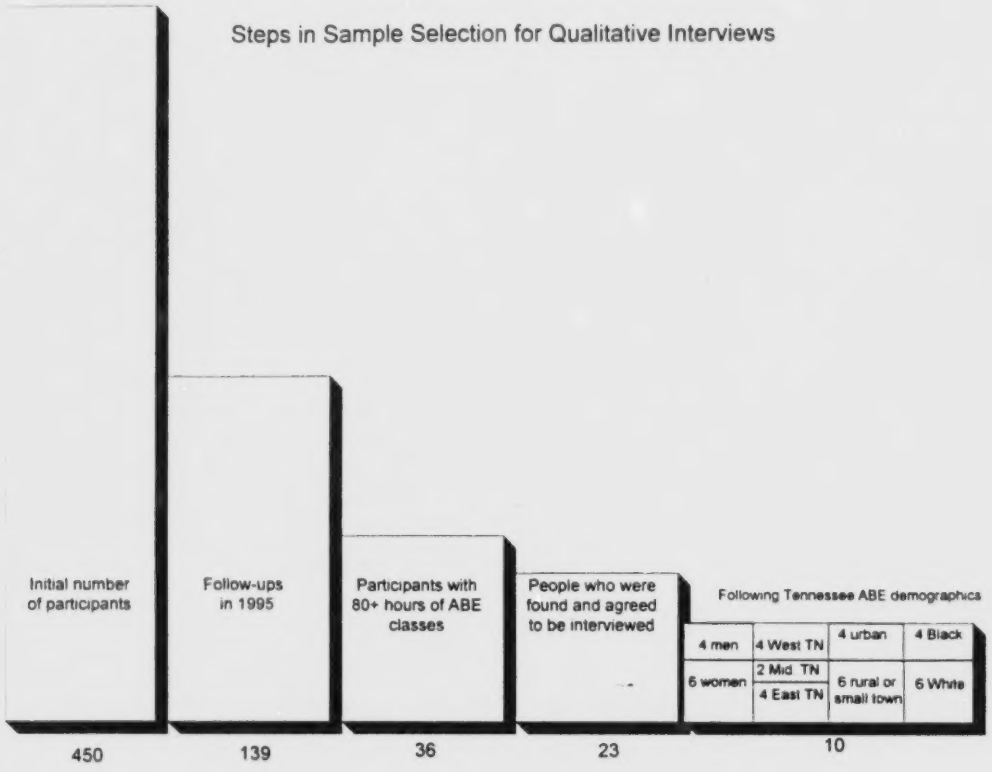
the study from which we drew our sample (up to six years have passed since the first participants were interviewed in 1991). Another reason could be the higher mobility of younger people, which led to lower chances of locating them. The following graphic illustrates the steps we took in identifying the participants for this study.



Data Collection

The primary source of data for this study was two extended semi-structured interviews with the ten participants. The participants were paid $50.00 for each of the two interviews. These audio taped interviews were transcribed, and the interviewers wrote field notes after each interview. We also have used, to a limited extent, the survey interviews done as part of the Tennessee longitudinal

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study, primarily as background information about the participants. From the longitudinal study files and from our interview visits, we obtained some limited information about the adult education programs in which the participants were students and about the communities where they live.

Interview Design

The interview protocol was developed as a guide for the interviewers, not as a structure for the interview. We identified topics we hoped to cover, but did not expect to follow any particular order in the interviews. We knew we wanted people to talk about their lives, their experiences in adult education, their childhoods and their early schooling. In developing the protocol for the first interview, we reviewed protocols from other studies and sources such as Mishler (1986) and Weiss (1994). The full protocol for interview one and interview two can be found in Appendix One and Appendix Two, respectively.

As we were designing the study and the interview protocol, we met with two advisory groups. The NCSALL Assessment Advisory Group was made up of researchers and practitioners in the field of adult literacy nationally. We also consulted with a local advisory group of six adult basic education students from three programs. They reviewed and approved the interview protocol and offered advice on how to best approach the interviews. They also discussed their own experiences in adult education programs. While we did not change the process based on their advice, (for example, their advice to drop the audio taping) we learned from their suggestions about how to approach people.

After the advisory group of students had reviewed the interview protocol, we piloted the interview with a local adult education student. She had been part of the advisory group, but spoke hardly at all in the meeting. However, in her own home she spoke freely, and we determined that the interview protocol was effective.

Before these second interviews, we had done an initial analysis of the data from the first interviews, and we identified various categories and themes. We wanted to follow up on these themes in the second interviews. We also had questions of clarification for various people. For the second round of interviews we developed a two-part protocol. The second interviews were a combination of questions we hoped every person would address and clarification questions for specific individuals. The general questions for the second round of interviews can

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be found in Appendix Two. As in the first round, these questions were used as a guide for the interviewer, not as specific questions to ask each person.

Interview Process

The interviews were conducted in a place of the participant's choosing. Seven preferred to be interviewed in their homes. Three were interviewed elsewhere: in an empty classroom, at our hotel, and in a car. The interviews were scheduled by mail and telephone. Usually two of us were at the interview, one asking most of the questions, the other attending to the tape recorder. But the interviews were informal and both interviewers were involved in what were, in effect, conversations. The interviews were taped, and the tapes were transcribed by the interviewers. Additionally, each interviewer made notes following each interview, and these notes were reviewed as part of the analysis process.

For the most part we were pleased with the quality of the interviews. The people we interviewed seemed to talk freely and spoke of difficult as well as pleasant parts of their lives. They nearly all began the first interview by discussing their adult education experiences, probably because they had been part of the earlier study and knew the topic of our study. But they moved on to other topics and discussed their childhoods, their families, and particularly their work. The interview with Bert, the youngest male participant, was the only interview that was difficult, and from him we got answers to our direct questions, but little else. Bert did not want to be interviewed a second time, we think because of a misunderstanding about payment for the first interview.

There were challenges in doing this study. One challenge was finding and maintaining our sample. We identified ten people (as has been described) but when we began the interviews we were not able to locate one of our original sample, a white woman from a rural East Tennessee county. She was replaced by a white woman from a small town in Middle Tennessee who was approximately the same age.

Another challenge was overcoming geography and time constraints. We conducted nine of our first round of interviews within two months. The final participant, Will, was working long hours six days a week, and we were not able to schedule an interview with him until three months later. When we began the follow-up interviews, we had difficulty contacting some people. Bert did not want to be interviewed a second time. Although Kris scheduled a second

interview, she would not see us when we arrived, and we were not able to contact her again. Suzanne, who lives in West Tennessee, was not able to make one interview and when we arrived at her house we found no one home. We were able to reschedule her interview, however. We were not able to schedule face-to-face follow-up interviews with Marvin or Will due to scheduling conflicts, but did do extensive phone interviews.

Ideally, in this kind of study, we would have had more contact with the participants over time. This would have been easy for the East Tennessee participants, but we were not able to repeatedly visit people in West Tennessee, because of the distance and scheduling difficulties. We believe, however, that, with the exception of Bert, the interviews were comprehensive, and we were able to establish rapport with participants who were generally willing to share their experiences with us.

Analysis Process

The data from the interviews were analyzed using an inductive iterative process. While our primary question was about the impacts and outcomes of their participation in adult literacy programs, we did not immediately code for outcomes. Rather, we tried to listen to what the participants were saying both as individuals and as a group. We noted both particular stories and common themes and categories. The broad categories that cut across all interviews were to some extent determined by the questions we had asked and the probes we used, e.g. work, adult education classes, early schooling. We also identified themes across categories that emerged from the interviews, e.g. value of education and impact of poverty and race.

The steps we took in this iterative process were:

1. Writing note cards about themes and categories as we transcribed and checked transcription of the first round of interviews. Each research team member did this independently. We each sorted our cards into themes and categories.

2. Creating "lists" of data fragments (sections of the interview) on each of our broad categories. Several lists were then coded for sub-categories. We reviewed these as we developed the protocol for the second round of interviews.

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3. Noting possible new categories or themes as we transcribed the second round of interviews.

4. Adding data from second round interviews to our original lists, and coding the data using both original categories and several new ones.

5. Comparing categories and noting basic agreement in content. We then combined our categories and created six broad categories containing over sixty subcategories and five themes that cut across the categories. Using NUD*IST software, we recoded the entire data set using the merged categories.

These six categories formed the structure of the findings that are reported in following sections. The findings are descriptive of people's lives, comparative in some instances, and include the changes that people themselves identified.

Reliability and Validity

In examining what Goetz and LeCompte (1984) and others call the credibility of this study, we use guidelines proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) for judging qualitative studies. They focus on five issues, pairing traditional terms with alternatives more appropriate for qualitative research. We address each in turn.

Objectivity/External reliability, or the extent to which other researchers would generate similar results in similar settings, is assessed by Miles and Huberman by asking if methods are described explicitly, if conclusions are linked with displayed data, if data are retained, if competing conclusions are considered, and if researchers are aware and explicit about their personal biases and assumptions. We have been explicit about our methodology of data collection and analysis, connect our findings to displayed data throughout the report, and have considered and discuss alternative conclusions.

We have tried to be aware of our assumptions and biases from the beginning of this work. We came to this work as part of a center that supports adult basic education, and so had to recognize how this biased the conclusions in favor of those that are positive outcomes of adult basic education. We value education, including adult basic education, but recognized that we needed to listen to the meanings of education as defined by the participants, both in our data collection and our analysis. By grounding this study in the words of the participants, we believe we are true to their interpretations of their experiences.

In other ways, the fact that we were a team of two researchers with quite different experiences meant we brought assumptions that tended to counteract each other. One of us had extensive experience working with adult basic education students and needed to be aware of a favorable bias toward adult literacy students. This was countered by the other team member who recognized a possible bias of an educated person who seldom encountered anybody in their life who did not read and write and who initially assumed, for example, that our participants' children would be high-school drop-outs. Both researchers are white women and, as such, we took into account the ways our assumptions had been shaped by race and gender. The fact that one of us grew up in the southern U.S. while the other grew up in the former U.S.S.R. again gave us different perspectives and helped us recognize each other's biases.

Reliability/Dependability concerns the consistency of the study over time. Using the queries that Miles and Huberman suggest to establish this type of reliability, we believe that our work is reliable within the constraints of a limited study. Our study design is congruent with our research questions and the researcher's role is explicit (see Methodology section). Findings across informants showed "meaningful parallelism" (Miles & Huberman, p. 278). Our analytic constructs are specified in this report. Each researcher coded the data separately, and we had substantial agreement. The work has been reviewed by colleagues and the final report by external reviewers.

Internal validity/Credibility is related to whether the findings of the study make sense (Miles & Huberman, p. 278). Miles and Huberman offer a series of possible queries to address this question. We have addressed credibility by extensive use of quotations to support our findings, by developing a comprehensive account of our findings, by linking data to theory, and by being explicit about negative (or number of positive) instances.

The credibility of the participants is critical to credibility of this study. As described in the section on methodology, the participants were chosen to be "typical" of Tennessee literacy students. The research team had no connection to the participants other than as interviewers and while there was probably some tendency to speak positively of adult education since that was to focus on the study, we heard positive and negative comments. We found consistency of accounts between topics covered in both our interviews and in earlier interviews conducted with participants as part of the Tennessee longitudinal study. We also found consistency between the first and second interviews, which were conducted several months apart. As previously noted, all interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. For these reasons, we have confidence in the overall credibility of the participants' interviews.

External validity/Transferability refers to the issue of generalizability. Clearly a study with ten participants from one state cannot be generalized to all adult literacy students. However, again based on Miles and Huberman's queries, this study can inform policy and practice in adult literacy education. The characteristics of the participants are fully described. The sampling methods are clear. The findings include enough description to allow readers to assess the transferability to their own settings. Findings are connected to prior theory and compared to findings from other studies.

Utilization/Application is the final credibility issue Miles and Huberman discuss: whether the study leads "to more intelligent action" (p. 280). We have tried to write a report that is "intellectually and physically accessible to potential users" (p. 280). We have suggested implications of the study for adult literacy practitioners and policy makers. We believe the study will broaden the reader's understanding of literacy learners and the impacts of adult education on their lives.

Section 3: The Context And the Participants

The people and the programs in this study are scattered across Tennessee. Tennessee is a long state, never much more than 100 miles from border to border north and south, but 450 miles from Memphis to the North Carolina state line on Interstate 40.

The state is roughly divided into three regions: East, Middle, and West. East Tennessee is home to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the Tennessee Valley Authority, and Oak Ridge. The cities of Knoxville and Chattanooga are industrialized and relatively prosperous, but rural east Tennessee counties are mountainous and often isolated and impoverished. As mines and mills have closed, people must drive long distances to work in the region's factories. West Tennessee is flat agricultural land with the state's largest city, Memphis, on the Mississippi River. The rural counties surrounding Memphis have the state's highest unemployment. The rolling hills of Middle Tennessee, with the state capital Nashville and major automobile manufacturing plants, is the state's most prosperous area. The sites for this study included one urban and one rural East Tennessee communities, a small town in Middle Tennessee, and a rural community, a small town, and Memphis in West Tennessee. The following table presents socio-economic information for each county:

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Table 1: Tennessee County Data Based on 1990 Census

	Rural West	Urban West	Small town West	Urban East	Rural East	Small town Middle	Tennessee
Total population	25,559	826,330	19,437	335,749	42,383	30,411	4,877,185
Median income, $	9,627	13,330	11,068	14,007	10,508	11,311	12,255
Household size	2.97	2.65	2.74	2.42	2.55	2.59	2.6
% "minority" population	44.5	45.0	50.1	10.1	5.2	10.8	17
% population below poverty level	24.1	18.3	25	14.1	17.2	16	17
% people age 25+ without high school diploma	43.1	25.9	47	25.4	42.8	42.8	34

Table 2: County Unemployment

Data available for 1995						
	Rural West	Urban West	Small town West	Urban East	Rural East	Small town Middle
Total population	26,954	865,058	19,608	361,407	445,001	33,126
% unemployed	5.3	4.9	11.7	3.4	9.5	6.2

The Ten Participants

The ten participants were from varied places and have lived varied lives. A few have lived their lives only in urban areas, but most had rural roots. Most have been married and have children. All have worked for wages, several for many years. While only one had completed high school, all came to adult education with a strong belief in the value of education. In this section we introduce the participants in this study and summarize the demographic information about the group.

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Introduction

Bert is a young man who lives with his mother in Memphis. He was 27 when we interviewed him. He attends ABE classes four days a week and hopes to work with computers. He plans to take computer courses when he passes his GED. Bert dropped out of school in the 10th grade because he had "problems with kids." He has worked at several jobs including temporary work in different factories. He injured his back and was not working when we interviewed him. Bert has a brother who is a maintenance worker for the city and did not finish high school. His sister has a GED. Bert enjoys walking, swimming, reading magazines, and listening to music. He attends church and has sung in the choir.

Elizabeth also lives in Memphis where she moved from Mississippi when she was 19. She recently retired after working in the same restaurant for 29 years. She has four grown daughters and one of her granddaughters lives with her. Elizabeth attended grade school in rural Mississippi until the eighth grade. Her schooling was often interrupted by work in the fields. As she neared retirement she decided to enroll in ABE classes to improve her reading and writing abilities. She attended classes for three and a half years. She stopped when she had to move from the neighborhood when her apartment development was being renovated.

Harry lives in a small Middle Tennessee town. He was born in the county close by in 1924. He left school when he was sixteen and in the eighth grade to help support his family by working in a harness shop. During World War II, when he was 18, he went to Michigan to work in a defense factory and after the war married and settled there. He was working in an auto parts plant when his wife left him with two young daughters to raise. When his daughters were grown, Harry returned to Tennessee, bought a house and worked for a local auto parts plant for another fourteen years. After he had been retired for a few years, he enrolled in the local ABE program and after three months took and passed the GED test.

June lives in a small apartment in the East Tennessee city where she was born. She is one of nine children, and she left school in the tenth grade when she was pregnant. She is separated from her husband and lives with their two daughters, one who is in high school and the other in pre-school. June spent seven months in ABE classes but stopped when she was pregnant with her second child. She has recently enrolled in a high school correspondence program. At the

same time she has started working in the kitchen of a nursing home. June is thirty-four.

Kris is a young woman living in a small town near Ruth and Harry. She grew up in a family that moved often. After she came to Tennessee from Mississippi, she left school in the ninth grade. She has three school-age children whose father is in prison. Kris has enrolled in ABE twice, but only attended for a short time. She has serious health problems that interfere with employment and possibly class attendance. She is close to her parents and siblings and depends on them for support.

Laura, who is forty-seven, lives in the same city as June. She grew up and graduated from high school in Mississippi, but has felt limited by her lack of spelling and reading skills. She has been married twice and has two grown children, a married daughter who lives in Memphis and a son who is in college. Laura has held many jobs, but is now limited in what she can do by poor health. She has recently re-enrolled in ABE classes to work on literacy skills. She had attended classes in 1992- 1993, but stopped during the time she was leaving her second husband. Laura is active in her church and sings in the choir.

Marvin, a man in his early fifties, lives in a rural West Tennessee county. He began attending ABE classes after he was forced to retire because of health problems. He attended for two years until his health interfered with classes. He hopes to return. Marvin left school after his father died when he was about ten. He had never attended school regularly, often staying out to work in the cotton fields. He did not learn to read and write, but was able to find work, eventually working for the same company for many years as a mechanic and truck driver. Marvin married and raised five children. He and his second wife are foster parents and have been active in a foster parents organization.

Ruth lives in the same town as Harry. She grew up with her six brothers in the mountains of East Tennessee. When her family moved to North Carolina she attended high school until the ninth grade when she dropped out. She and her husband moved to the town where he was raised in middle Tennessee. She has worked in chicken processing plants for twelve years. Her daughter, who is married and has two small children, lives nearby. Ruth has attended ABE classes since 1992. She hopes to get her GED and a better job, but she is only able to attend classes in warm weather because she is too cold after a day at her job to go out in the winter.

Suzanne is a thirty-one year old woman who lives with her husband and three daughters in a rural West Tennessee county. She was enrolled in three different ABE classes and passed the GED test in 1996 after taking it four times. She quit school in the tenth grade and married to get away from her family. Suzanne has worked at a variety of manufacturing jobs but has never had good daycare and has had to quit. She says she enjoys working, but the lack of childcare, reliable transportation and the ambivalence of her new husband has made working difficult. She would like a "goo ob with some security. Suzanne's brother also dropped out of school and only recently "straightened his life out". Her younger sister finished high school and has a "good job" in Memphis. Suzanne's oldest daughter does very well in school and has won academic awards. Her youngest daughter is an articulate preschooler who "knows how to do everything." Her middle daughter has trouble with school work. Suzanne enjoys being busy, exercising, and doing things with her hands.

Will is a man in his early fifties living in a rural East Tennessee community. He grew up on a farm, and like his four brothers, left school in the eighth grade to go to work. He spent many years working for a manufacturing plant about 20 miles from his home. He enrolled in ABE when he lost a mechanic's job because he did not have a high school diploma. After about six months in class, he got another manufacturing job and does not have time for class. He is married to a woman who works as a truck dispatcher. They have two children, a grown son and daughter who attends the University of Tennessee. Will is active in his church and plays guitar.

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Table 3: Demographic Information on Study Participants

Name	Gender	Race	Location	DOB	Employment facts	High school or equivalent	Grade completed
Bert	m	b	urban	1970	Some past employment, mostly temporary.		9
Elizabeth	f	b	urban	1933	Long-term employment in a restaurant (same employer). Retired.		7
Harry	m	w	small town	1924	Long-term employment with in manufacturing with two employers; retired.	GED	8
June	f	w	urban	1966	Little past employment. Now is working as a kitchen aide.		9
Kris	F	w	small town	1968	Some past employment as an assistant manager and in chicken processing plant.		9
Laura	f	b	urban	1952	Past employment in service jobs and manufacturing.	HS grad	12
Marvin	m	b	rural	1945	Long-term w/ same employer (truck-driver & mechanic). Retired due to health.		5
Ruth	f	w	small town	1955	Long term employment in food processing.		8
Suzanne	f	w	small town	1966	Past employment in manufacturing. Resumed work last year.	GED	10
Will	m	w	small town	1945	Long-term employment in manufacturing. Currently employed.		8

Backgrounds of the ten participants were diverse, but their lives had certain things in common. One of these things was participation in Adult Basic Education.

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Section 4: The Adult Education Experience

We did not observe classes or visit programs and have limited and varied information about the eight programs. We do have the observations of the participants about their experiences and in this section we examine the adult education experiences of the participants as they described them. Following a brief description of how adult basic education is structured in Tennessee we focus on the participation of this group of adults: why they enrolled, what the barriers and the impetus were that helped them move beyond barriers, why they stayed, why they left. Next we listen to how the group talked about their teachers. Finally, we review the materials and methods that they encountered in their adult literacy classes.

While the lives and home communities of the our participants varied, their adult education experiences seem to have been quite similar, with the exception of June's correspondence course. The primary variation in the programs they attended was the amount of time that classes were available. Ruth attends classes two nights a week for two hours a night. Bert, Laura, and Elizabeth attended classes four days a week for four to five hours a day.

This group of adult learners has moved in and out of programs. Table 4 presents the enrollment information for the ten participants. The question marks in the table also demonstrate a typical difficulty of adult basic education research - limited access to and accuracy of program attendance data.

Table 4 : Chart of Program Participation

Name	Cohort	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	Hours	GED
Bert	1		———		——?			?——?		122+	
Elizabeth	2		———	———	———	———	———	——?		148+	
Harry	3			———						247	Yes
June	2		———						———	101+	
Kris	3				———			———		95+	
Laura	1		———						——?	127+	
Marvin	1		———	———	——?					98	
Ruth	2		- - -	- - -	- - -	- - ?	- - -	- - -	- - -	137+	
Suzanne	1	———			?———	———	——?			82	Yes
Will	3			———	———					214	

We know that, at the time of the second interview, only June and Ruth were still enrolled in ABE classes; Ruth, however, only attends when the weather is not very cold (that's why her program participation is marked with a dotted line - ---------).

ABE in Tennessee

State-funded Adult Basic Education in Tennessee has been provided typically by local educational agencies, usually a county system but also city school systems, under contract with the state Department of Education Office of Adult and Community Education. In some localities, private volunteer literacy programs are the major provider. All the programs in this study were state-funded. State-funded programs often use volunteer tutors as well as paid teachers. Most ABE teachers in Tennessee are part time. In most counties only the ABE supervisor is full-time.

Instruction in Tennessee programs is usually conducted in small groups or in individualized lessons by part-time teachers. Recent funding to support classes for people who are part of Tennessee's welfare reform program, Families First, has meant that most counties now have twenty-hour-a-week classes, but eight out of ten participants in this study were in classes that met twice a week for three to four hours a session. The participants in this study were students in programs that vary in size from 200 students in rural programs to 3000 students in the Memphis program.

Participation in ABE: Reasons for Enrolling

The participants in this study enrolled in adult education for a variety of reasons. When they were interviewed as part of the Tennessee Longitudinal Study (TLS), the reasons they gave for enrollment are summarized in Table 5:

Table 5: Reason for Participation Given at Time of Enrollment

Name	Reason given at the time of enrollment
Bert	To go to military
Elizabeth	Wanted to get education, important to me
Harry	Always wanted a diploma
June	Get GED to get a job and job training
Kris	Better job, get off AFDC & Food Stamps
Laura	To learn spelling, reading, math, to better self, support family
Marvin	To learn to read and write, improve basic skills and self as
Ruth	GED to get better job
Suzanne	Get GED to go to factory
Will	Better job & benefits; to prove I can do it

When they were interviewed as part of this study the reasons given for participation were similar. The group talked about participating in adult literacy education for four broad purposes:

- for access to jobs or training (6);
- to improve their reading (3);
- to "do it," for the sense of accomplishment (3);
- and to redress a right denied (2).

Bert, Suzanne, Kris, June, Will and Ruth all have seen earning a GED certificate as necessary for their access to a better job or for training for a better job.

I wanted to get my diploma and continue my education, go on to college. (Bert)

But usually, if you ain't got a high school diploma -- "We can't use you." (June)

I want to get the kids whatever they want, and I can't do it without a GED and a good job." (Kris)

Elizabeth, Laura, and Marvin talked about wanting to improve their reading and spelling. While they had a variety of reasons for wanting to improve their skills, their primary reason for enrolling was to be better able to read and write.

And that's the reason I started going to school, on account of that. Because I wanted to read my Bible. Because I know I'd seen people get up in church, you know can't read. I know I did one Sunday. You know we had to read verse by verse in Sunday school, and I just couldn't read all them words. (Elizabeth)

And here lately I have thought about going back to the adult classes to try to better my reading and see really, truly, how far I can get. Can I really conquer the reading skills that I just couldn't get as a child? (Laura)

I still want to pick up this paper and just flip it over right quick and not have to stumble over the letters in it. It don't make sense you know, I wants to be able to do this and do it freely, and knowing what I'm reading, and being able to understand what I'm reading. (Marvin)

While most participants had a functional reason for attending adult education classes, for Harry completing schooling (getting a GED) was primarily for his personal satisfaction; he wanted to see if he could do it. Suzanne and Will expressed similar sentiments.

Well, I just wanted to see if I still had enough marbles, I reckon, to get a GED. I wasn't trying to get a job because I'd already retired.... I just wanted to see if I could get it I reckon. (Harry)

I thought, well O.K., I need it for one thing, to get a job. And the next thing, I want it because I can say I can do it. And I did. (Suzanne)

When Marvin and Elizabeth talked about their difficulties reading, they both used the phrase, "It don't make sense." They were referring to their

difficulties reading, not to the texts; it did not make sense that they should have these difficulties. Marvin went further and spoke of his lack of education in terms of something that had been denied him.

> *And now all I wants to do is to go further in the program, find out as I go along what I really missed. I missed a lot. And I wants it back.* (Marvin)

The reasons for enrolling in adult education, the goals this group brought with them, were many. The extent to which these goals were met is addressed in the final section of this report.

Barriers to Getting Started

As they described enrolling in adult literacy programs, nearly all the participants said it was something they had been considering for some time for all the reasons discussed in the previous section. But there were barriers that had interfered. For some like Harry and Will it was lack of time. Lack of childcare or transportation were barriers for Suzanne and Elizabeth.

But perhaps the most powerful barriers were internal. Elizabeth, Laura, Marvin, and Will all talked about their fear of ridicule and sense of shame about going to school at their age.

> *And it was very enjoyable to me to go back to try to learn, but I had reservations about it because of my age.* (Laura)

> *And I was shamed, that's another thing. I couldn't see myself going to class, grow man, fifty years old almost sitting up in a class. And it was just embarrassing to me.* (Marvin)

> *Well, to start with, I guess, that was my biggest thing about being as old as I was, but I tell you what, when I got there and seen the other people that -- I mean there were people in there older than me. I mean everybody was in the same boat when you got there.* (Will)

Harry, June, Ruth, and Elizabeth talked about being shy.

> *But the first day I went over there I was kind of shy. But after I got over there and before that week was gone I was o.k.* (Elizabeth)

As they attended literacy classes, sometimes their discomfort disappeared quickly when they discovered they were not alone in having difficulties reading, and sometimes, discomfort disappeared slowly, as they discovered they could learn:

> *No, I was not [comfortable] at first. I was very shy that I didn't know anything, all the fractions and stuff. But I learned that really good.* (Ruth)

> *And it was just embarrassing to me. But after I started and I seen more that just me sitting there. Some people were sixty and seventy years old. I said, "Good gracious, why should I be ashamed?"* (Marvin)

It is interesting to note that this discomfort, shyness or shame was named by all the older participants, while, of the younger participants, only June, who has trepidations about contact with any groups of more than a few people, expressed discomfort with enrolling in an adult basic education program.

Impetus to Enroll

Each of these ten people overcame the barriers that had interfered with attending literacy programs and enrolled. Most of them described some incident or "turning point" (Fingeret and Drennon, 1997) that was the impetus for the decision to enter a literacy program. Bert dropped out of high school and looked for an alternative; Laura enrolled as a requirement for getting food stamps; Will quit one job when he was offered a better one, only to have the offer withdrawn because he did not have a GED.

Their families were often a positive force. Marvin's wife encouraged him to go to classes, and eventually he did. Will's family had encouraged him. June decided to go back to school when her daughter (who has since been her "coach") made fun of her.

> *Well [my daughter] called me a dummy. She said, "Mama, you are a dummy, don't know how to read or learn nothing." I said, "No, I could prove it to you." And I did.*

Ruth and Elizabeth both described how public service advertisements led them to enroll.

> *Well, I was talking to my daughter, I was at her place. I told her I saw*

this ad in our newspaper about the adult classes, and also saw on the TV. And she said, "Mom, if you'll go, I'll go, too." So I said I'd go. (Ruth)

One day I was here listening to the radio and it said something about the ____ Center and you take class over there. That day I was sweeping the floor or something. I dropped the mop in the middle of the floor, put some clothes on, and went over there and signed up for it. I sure did. I'll never forget it. Dropped that mop in the middle of the floor. I wanted to sign up for school. (Elizabeth)

From the stories of most of these participants, we hear of a period of consideration of attending an adult literacy education program and then some particular push that led them to enroll. Lofland and Stark (1965, as cited in Fingeret and Drennon, 1997) refer to a period of prolonged tension followed by a turning point when new possibilities are opened. Many of the participants in our study seem to have followed this process.

Persistence: Staying and Leaving

All the participants in this study stayed in adult education classes at least 80 hours after initial enrollment. Some stayed much longer. Reasons this group gave for continuing participation included the learning that they were doing and their appreciation of having a place to go. Ruth talked about why she re-enrolls each spring:

I go because I'm learning more. That's the reason I like to go, because they showed me a lot of stuff. (Ruth)

Attending adult literacy classes both gave structure to their days (Marvin and Elizabeth) and provided "*a more happier environment*" (Suzanne)

Their goals and the number of hours they attended indicate the strong commitment of these ten people to adult education. But only Harry enrolled and remained in the program until his goal, the GED, was met (in his case in a few months.) The rest of the group left their programs before achieving their stated goals (Table 5, p. 24) though many re-enrolled later. The reasons they gave for leaving include:

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- Problems with child care (June, Laura, Suzanne)
- Health problems (June, Marvin, Laura)
- Getting a job (Will, Bert)
- Passing the GED test (Harry, Suzanne)
- Program factors (Suzanne, Kris)
- Moved away from program (Elizabeth)
- The cold in winter (Ruth).

With the exception of Ruth's, these reasons are similar to the obstacles identified in research by Comings, Parrella, & Soricone (2000) and others.

Program Content: Teachers, Methods, Materials

Program content, as described by the participants, gives us some idea of the kind of adult education experience they had. The information we have about the instructional approaches of the particular programs in this study come from the participants' observations and descriptions of their programs. In this section we report their comments on their teachers and their descriptions of the instructional methods and materials used in their classes.

Teachers

The words used most often to describe the teachers included: *nice, understanding, patient, sweet, real good, they want you to learn.* The teachers were respected and valued by all the participants in the study. While there were a few comments, both positive and negative, about their teachers' approaches to instruction, most of the comments were about teachers' qualities and the individual attention and encouragement they gave the learners.

> *So I really enjoy it. I know that. We got a good teacher and everything. Principal and everybody over there are nice. And they're understanding. Don't nobody make fun of nobody. ..... But that's a nice place over there. They're nice. Them teachers over there are good now. They're really good about learning you. ..... They really good. They really nice. All of them. I ain't had one teacher that wasn't nice, since I been going over there. All of them nice. Cause I thought, well those teachers will be making fun of you. But they weren't.* (Elizabeth)

> *But I loved all my teachers when I was going, especially Ms. D_____, and*

she was-- she really meant a lot to me, she talked to me. .....The teacher can become your best friend. I mean, if you have a good relationship with your teacher, and they come to you, and act like they are concerned about you, that makes you feel like, well, they really want me to know something, they really going to be here for me. They ought to be like your mentors, you can go to them, and sit down and talk to them about everything, also about what they are trying to teach you, and I felt like my teacher when I was going to night school, Ms. D____ she was, I could talk to her about anything. (Suzanne)

Oh now, our teachers that we had was very patient and very sweet and loving. My teachers that I had. (Laura)

The teachers' willingness to respond individually to questions was important.

Everything operates good. The teacher, she come around when you have any questions, or when you need help. Answers questions. (Bert)

The way the teachers took their time, and they talked to you one on one, trying to understand what your problem is, what you are learning here. And, you know, they explained how to do, you know, nobody made fun of you. And them up there, they let me take my time, let all of us take our time, you know, their attitude and everything was, you know, positive, you're going to do if they coach you... Like, if they coach you: you're going to make it, don't give up yet. (June)

There were three instances of discomfort or disagreement with a teacher. Harry had a male teacher who made him uncomfortable.

That man teacher, he'd, well all the teachers though up there, they, you know, really explained it to you and all. And... But it just seemed like that one guy, he just would make me nervous. I'd forget. (Harry)

Kris found the teachers were moving through the material too slowly.

There, I mean, I liked the people. People were really sweet, I mean, they will help you. But I didn't like what they were doing. As they tell you to do a certain thing, you get it done, you get it all right, I want to go to the next thing. There, they give you the same thing over and over. If I get

something right, and I understand it, I want to go to the next one. (Kris)

Suzanne did not get the attention she wanted from one teacher and left that program. She found the individual support she needed in a different class. For her, as for the others in the group, willingness to provide individual assistance was the hallmark of a good teacher.

Methods and Materials

As these adult learners describe it, instruction seems to have been focused on decontextualized skills rather than based on skills learned and practiced in the context of projects connected to concerns and interests of learners. Life situations of learners do not appear to have been integrated into the curriculum. Classes were often focused on the skills and content needed to pass the GED test.

The instructional methods that people mentioned included:

- work in workbooks or on "papers"(10 times)
  My classes I went with, I worked with mostly all books... Lot of times, we had to double up on the books.

- working on computers (8 times)
  It shows you, it gives you a test on it, and then,... a score on it
  It would read out on the computer a story, and then you'd have to write something out about it.

- board work, especially for math (3 times).
  My teacher would get up there, and she would work out the problem, just step by step...

Mentioned once or twice were:

- one-on-one tutoring with Laubach materials
- class discussion
- reading newspapers
- using tapes with earphones.

The computers seem to have been used primarily as electronic workbooks.

> *We had computers and all, and for math and all, you had to get up there on all them fractions and they'd say "which is closer to a certain number?" and give you four-five different answers there, you'd have to pick it out.* (Harry)

> *They let us go on the computers and learn how to work some of them. And it had some English stuff on it and I got interested in that.* (June)

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The "subjects" people talked about studying most often were math and reading. Also mentioned were English, spelling, writing, history, social studies, and science. People talked about learning primarily skills. Of twenty-one instances of comments about things learned in classes, seventeen were skills. Some examples include:

- *how to write an essay*
- *about paragraphs, margins*
- *A, E, I, O, U and sometimes Y*
- *sounding it out in spelling*
- *to use dictionary*
- *to read better*
- *breaking words into syllables*
- *compound words.*

Three instances of learning what might be called "life skills" were mentioned: learning how to fill out a money order and check and how to count money, both named by Elizabeth; and learning measurement, which Kris and Suzanne named. In Kris's case she was studying "inches and feet" right before we interviewed her and when we asked, she said she was using a book and had not used a ruler.

Only Laura spoke of particular informational content she had learned in literacy classes.

> *We went over the history of the Indians, where they was, you know, this is their land, this is Indian land more so.* (Laura)

Below are listed the participants' quotes about what they learned in ABE classes.

- *And I accomplished that, and I was so proud of myself when I could do that, an essay, essay is hard to write.*
- *I learned about paragraphs. And before I did not know about margins either, did not leave any space.*
- *Then I learned how to use a dictionary.*
- *I've learned a lot about reading , it makes me want to read now, and try to read better.*
- *First when I went I didn't know any fractions.*
- *Learning how to read maps from the adult classes…*
- *How it breaks it down... You find out how many syllables and then you can read...*
- *And they learned me how to spell a lot better. Sound it out, and as you sound it out listen to what you're saying, and write it down...*
- *When it go to bigger, longer words, try to sound...I do pretty good on the A,E,I,O,U and sometimes, Y.*
- *And I didn't know what a compound word means.*
- *Went over the history of the Indians...*
- *Where we come as Black – what's that name, W Heatley, Phyllis W. Heatley. I read that book where she was a poet.*
- *Fixing money orders ... make money order to the person. And write a check, I know how to do that.*
- *How to count money better…*

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James Monroe High School: A Different Experience

June's experiences with adult education were included in the previous sections, but she also has an experience that is unique. After being out of adult education for four years she enrolled in a course that offers a high school diploma by correspondence. She pays forty dollars a month, which covers books, instructors' response to her work, and a toll-free number to instructors.

June had completed three courses when we last talked to her: Consumer Skills, Essentials of Grammar and Writing, and Introduction to Business. She was currently studying World Geography and described the process to us:

> *OK. What you do, like this is part 2 and part one, they got 2 books of this. You read the chapters, and at the end of the chapters it asks you questions about the chapter that you read, and you answer them. You go to this book, and it's got the tests in it, and you answer the test, and then you mail this part in. And they send it back to you after they've looked at it. Like, if you miss, they usually got 15 questions, if you miss like 9 or 10, they'll mail it back and tell you to redo it again. And they send you letters about how to explain it, why you got that question wrong, and it tells you where to find the answer at and stuff.*
>
> *It still takes me a while to read a chapter. It takes me, like 2 days to read one chapter, to understand the words in it. And usually in a week time I can do like 2 chapters and then the test, do the test.*
>
> *I really enjoy it. And they got a toll-free number 24 hours a day, and if I got a real hard question, I can call and get the answer to it, or write them. They give you at the end of each book, say like you got questions for instruction on something you don't understand, you could write them or call them, either one.*

June had been enrolled in a local adult education program, but quit when her health and pregnancy interfered. She also reported being bored by some of the classes. June describes herself as very shy. Being able to work at home and the control she has over the pace of instruction are the reasons she gives for preferring correspondence school. She is also pleased to be earning a "real" diploma instead of a GED.

I was telling my Mom that something like that I could do. Now in classroom, I can't sit in the classroom and do it. It's like, it might be me, and it feels to me like the teachers pushes me along, and I can't do the work in the classroom. But if I am by myself, I can do anything.

It's not like I am doing 2 or 3 different subjects at the same time---- Like this, when I get done with this, I'll get my math book, and I'll focus on just math. When it comes to 2 or 3 different things, I can't focus on it like that. And when I took math up there [in the ABE program], of course it was adding and subtracting, which that was easy to me. I wanted something like algebra and stuff, something I did not learn in school. And I got the algebra, and of course it took me a while, but I figured that out, too. And got it down. They didn't, up there they didn't, the English teacher up there just taught like a elementary school teacher. Which I knew how to do that, I wanted high school stuff, come on. And I got disgusted with it, and it's like, they really wasn't teaching me what I really wanted them to teach me.

All the books is included, and after you graduate they send you, --now, it's not a GED diploma, it's a high school diploma, and then they give you a high school graduation ring. At the end of, you know, your studies and everything. And then like, these here that I passed, when I finished the complete book, and they grade them all and send them all back, they send me a certificate stating that you pass this course here.

They go back, they get your school records from elementary school on up, and besides the required course, you get to pick your elective course, what you want. And they go back to your school records to see if you can do this.

June and her sister are both taking these courses.

She works day shift, where I work night shift. She works, when I'm off, she's at work, and when she's off when I am working. But she calls me and ask me questions. See, I am ahead of her. And she does almost the same course, the first couple is the same as mine. She is, "Well. what does this'un mean, what does that'un mean?" And I have to go and explain it to her, I have to get, "OK, hang on just one minute now, let me think." She'll call every now and then, she's got a question, I'll answer it for her, try to help to her.

I enjoy doing it. And it learned me a lot of stuff.

June's story about correspondence school raises some interesting issues that are not the focus of this report, but which indicate that more research on distance education in adult basic education is needed.

Summary

To summarize our findings about the adult education experiences of the participants in this study we look first at their participation. The group talked about participating in adult literacy education for four broad purposes:

- for access to jobs or training;
- to improve their reading;
- to "do it," for the sense of accomplishment;
- and to redress a right denied.

The barriers to their participation included the external barriers of lack of time, lack of childcare, and lack of transportation, and the internal barriers of fear and shame. Most of the participants went through a period when they considered attending an adult literacy education program and then some particular push -- a change in job status, an agency requirement, family encouragement -- led them to enroll. Some of the same factors that were barriers to enrollment led most participants to leave the programs, at least temporarily, before achieving their stated goals.

Because we did not ask specific questions of each person or probe for in-depth descriptions of their classes, we cannot say definitively what their classes were like or what content was covered. But from what they did say, we can conclude that for the most part the classes were supportive, individualized, and focused on learning and practicing decontextualized basic academic skills. June's experience with the correspondence school demonstrates that, at least for some students, alternative means of provision of educational services may be helpful.

Section 5: Ordinary Lives

Each of the people interviewed for this study talked about their lives before and after attending adult literacy programs. While we asked similar questions of each person, each interview was structured by the participant. So we have different levels of detail about different aspects of their lives from each person. We have divided the findings about people's lives into the four broad categories or topics that emerged from the data: everyday lives including families and growing up; work lives; literacy practices; and sense of self. In this section and the following three sections, we present these findings and discuss some of the changes that the participants described, and then, in the final section, we return to these changes in our discussion of impacts.

The everyday life experiences described by participants were a mix of hard times and "ordinary" life. While these people grew up in situations that might have led them to be classified as "at risk" as children today, when we listen to them talk about their lives as adults what struck us is how ordinary they were. They had jobs, raised children, went shopping, had hobbies, and were concerned about their neighbors and communities. The public discourse about adult literacy students describes an "other" (Stuart and Thomson, 1995,) that can be "cured" by adult literacy programs (Quigley, 1997). We believe strongly, as do the participants in this study, that people whose literacy skills and/or educational opportunities are limited may well gain a great deal from participation in adult literacy programs. But we have not found people who are "other" (Stuart & Thompson, 1995) than most Tennesseans. Perhaps these are not "typical" adult literacy students, but they are only atypical in that they attended classes for at least 80 hours (the average is 35 according to Young, 1995) and they were interviewed (and located) over the course of several years. Of the ten, only two had moved recently. The rest had lived in the same neighborhood and often the same house for over ten years, 22 years in Harry's case.

Housing and Neighborhoods

All the participants in this study have adequate housing. Harry, Will, and Marvin live in comfortable homes that they own. The others live in rented houses or apartments, subsidized for Kris, Laura, and Elizabeth. Both Elizabeth and Laura have complaints about their apartments' heat or maintenance. We did not hear this from Kris or the others. Ruth wishes she could afford a house instead of a trailer.

Everyone except Harry and Laura live with family members. June, Kris, and Suzanne have small children at home. A teenaged granddaughter lives with Elizabeth. Will, Marvin, and Ruth live with their spouses and have grown children nearby. Bert lives with his mother. All except Elizabeth drive and have access to a car, though not always one in running order.

The neighborhoods where people live vary considerably from rural communities to inner city Memphis. Three women, June, Laura, and Elizabeth, live in urban neighborhoods they describe as "tense" and dangerous, particularly at night. Their everyday lives are constrained to some extent by fear.

> *You all ain't got no business over here at nighttime.* (Elizabeth)

> *Now that's pretty bad when you can't let your kids out to play. But I got two little girls that understand, you know, "No, we ain't going out" because we don't want to get involved in that.* (June)

> *All I know is that there are drug sellers in the neighborhood next door, and people, they come and get whatever and go on. And I don't know if the drugs have any dealing with the shooting that's out in front there and sometimes in the back alley-way.* (Laura)

Some might think Ruth, Bert and Harry live in "bad" neighborhoods -- a trailer park, an older Memphis neighborhood, across the tracks in a small town -- but they don't think so. They describe their neighborhoods:

> *It's fine. The neighbors are friendly and close to the store, no fighting.* (Bert)

> *And for here, I mean, I like this little old house. Ball field over here, [fair] grounds over there. I feel like I am in the country, but still in the city. And so anyway, I just like it here myself.* (Harry)

And even Elizabeth says she has never had any problems, after forty years in her neighborhood.

Finances/Poverty

While no one in this group is at all wealthy, only Laura, Kris, and Suzanne spoke of financial problems. Laura depends on subsidized housing and support from her daughter and ex-husband: Kris gets disability and child support, but is in debt.

I've got my rent, my lights. I've got my beds, all of us got beds, I've got that payment. I've got my car payment. I've got a loan from two years ago I still got to pay off.
I only got, what, 20 dollars out my whole check a month to live on. (Kris)

Suzanne and her husband struggle to support her three daughters and his children.

So, really we just, we are trying to feed five kids and eight puppies and two, three dogs and two grown adults.

For the rest, there is either sufficient income or an ability to adjust to what income is available. Elizabeth, Harry, and June all talked about living within their means.

I'm doing fine. Don't take too much for me. I just make my [Social Security] check do, what I get..... You can live off just what God blessed you with, you'll be able to make it. (Elizabeth)

June, who recently opened her first checking account, resisted the bank's offers of ATM use.

I know if I want something in the store and I got my checkbook, well I don't have the money in the bank, I am not going to write that check... I said I didn't want no ATM card, I just want a basic check account, and that's it. If I had an ATM card I'd bounce, overbounce like crazy. So I told them they could keep that, and I'd just stick with my checks. (June)

But while this group for the most part is and have been self-supporting and have raised families, their lives have been "hard", and the younger ones' financial problems are compounded by costs born disproportionately by the poor -- higher rent-to-own prices because they have no credit, paying money order fees when they don't have a checking account, being unable to pay the "up front" lawyer's fees that might enable them to redress financial wrongs. These lives may be ordinary, but they are not easy.

Childhood and Schooling

It is in their descriptions of their childhoods that we most clearly see the impact of poverty on the lives of this group of people, and for the three older African-Americans -- Elizabeth, Marvin, and Laura -- the impact of the institutionalized racism of segregated schools. These ten adults were usually from big families averaging more than five children. Work and family problems interrupted the schooling of several of the participants.

Of the ten participants, six grew up in rural areas, working on farms even as children. They told stories of childhoods of hard physical work.

> *I said now when I was a child, I had to pick cotton. I had to cut wood. I had to bring in wood. I had to bring water in.* (Elizabeth)

> *The tiny little time that I did have in school, I forgot it all when my father died. I forgot all that I had learned. That's because I was so tied up and wrapped up in trying to take care of me and my mother because there was just only two of us, I didn't have my sisters and brothers, it was just only me. I am the onliest kid. And we tried to survive, and that's what we did. When he died, we had to try to gather that little cotton we had, pick it and chop it, and do around whatever.* (Marvin)

When they were children, their families did not have a lot of possessions.

> *I lost out on lots and lots of things that other kids have. And when I was growing up at Christmas time up to I was 12 years old, we was on the farm. If we'd get some firecrackers, that's all we got for Christmas. And one pair of shoes and one pair of overalls. And you was lucky to get that.* (Harry)

> *And very seldom did we go to town, as a child. It's just maybe on Easter. We would go on Easter, before that Sunday came about, we would go to town. Mom would have the kids gather up and take them to town to buy clothing to wear to church and what have you. And most of our clothing was give to us from the white people in the community that Mom worked for. And as we got older, we would pick cotton and make money, and we got our school clothes and [paper] and what have you.* (Laura)

Ruth and Will remembered good times as well as bad in their rural childhoods. Ruth played sports with her six brothers. Will talked about living for a time with a much-loved grandmother and about growing up learning to play the guitar in a musical family.

June, Bert, Suzanne, and Kris grew up in cities or small towns. Bert talked very little about his childhood except to say he left school because he was having problems with the kids at school. The times he had enjoyed in school were "going our for recess, eating lunch, sneaking off to the store." Kris's family moved many times from state to state.

June and Suzanne both described growing up in families disrupted by alcohol. June grew up in a large family, with eight siblings. Her mother had moved to the city from a farm and worked to maintain her family.

> *[Dad] was around when we were kids, he drank all the time. He stayed drunk. You know, he worked, he got up and worked, but it was when he come home, it was drinking. And we just, you know we just didn't bother. And Mama, she worked all the time. So basically we were there all day by ourselves, had to cook for ourselves while she worked. And that's how we was raised.* (June)

> *My home life, when I was at home, before I got married, was not good at all. My mother, she was working three, four jobs. And my father, he just stayed on prescription medication; he was addicted to that, and didn't have a job.* (Suzanne)

Both June and Suzanne left high school to get married. Will and Harry left school to go to work. Both attended rural schools in Tennessee.

> I didn't even get to start at school until I was eight years old. And so you can see I had a bad-- I started when I was eight and I got through the eighth grade at sixteen. I didn't fail any but I didn't get started.... I liked it pretty good till the last year, and I knew that I was going to quit quick as I was sixteen because I was going to have to, you know, go to work in a factory. (Harry)

> *I quit school in the eighth grade and started working on a farm. Times was hard, you know, back a few years ago. And I wasn't interested in school which mother should've taken a board to me, you know.* (Will)

Ruth and Kris also lost interest in school. Ruth's family moved from a remote mountain community in Tennessee to a farm in North Carolina. She left school in the ninth grade.

> *I just felt all the time that I was not learning anything. [The teachers] just couldn't teach me. And also the other kids, some of them looked at me as if I wasn't as smart as them.* (Ruth)

Kris also quit in the ninth grade after her family moved back to Tennessee from Mississippi.

> *Tennessee schools are totally different from Mississippi schools. When I lived in Mississippi, I made straight A's. When I got down here, I was making, you know, C's and D's. It's totally different. I guess, it's easier in Mississippi. They don't expect really nothing from you, but down in Tennessee they expect, you know, you to work hard at it. I guess, Mississippi don't. I mean, because as soon as I moved to Tennessee, I was making D's and C's, and I knew this stuff, but they were still giving me D's and C's when I made in Mississippi A's and B's. I can't explain that.* (Kris)

Table 6 summarizes participants' reasons for leaving school and their ages at the time.

Table 6: Leaving School

Name	Age left school	Grade	Reason
Bert	16	9	Social problems
Elizabeth	14-15	7	Economic
Harry	16	8	Economic
June	15-16	9	Pregnancy
Kris	16	9	Dislike of school
Laura	graduated	12	--
Marvin	10	5	Economic
Ruth	15-16	8	Dislike of school, social problems
Suzanne	17	10	Family and social problems
Will	15	8	Economic

Legacy of Segregation

Laura also went to school in Mississippi where she graduated from high school. Laura, Marvin, and Elizabeth attended school in the segregated south in schools for African-American children, schools that were legally separate and "inherently unequal" (Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483). While *de facto* segregation in schools with inferior resources is still a reality for many African-American children (Schiller, 1995), the legally segregated schools attended by Laura, Marvin, and Elizabeth were structurally inferior. Schools for African-American children operated on different schedules than those for White children, at least in the rural areas where Marvin and Elizabeth grew up.

> *When I was a little girl, we usually had to chop cotton. Before we go to school. In the morning time we used to have to chop --. No, I take that back. We usually couldn't go to school when it was pretty. Only time we could go to school was when it was cold. And there wasn't no nothing to do.* (Elizabeth)

> *I was about 8-9-10 years old. I was going to school, but I didn't get a chance to go every day. Because back then, if you was able to pick cotton and chop, when summertime come, whenever cotton chopping time come, school would shut down, we would have to go to the field. When time come to pick cotton, you had to stop and pick cotton. So you didn't get very much time in school because you had to stop and come home and pick your crop. And that's the way things were back then.*(Marvin)

When they were able to go to school, the schools had minimal resources. Elizabeth walked "more than two miles" to school and when she got there tried to warm herself by a wood stove.

> *One time I got to school I was so cold you know you put your hands to the fire and your hands started thawing up. Whew! That'd make you cry like a baby.* (Elizabeth)

Laura, twenty years younger than Elizabeth, did ride a bus to school. She told us that her school didn't close during cotton season, but that the teachers "would try to work with the students that had to be out to work in the farms." Laura had difficulties learning and with "up to fifty children in a class" did not get the help she needed.

> *And most of the books we got then was passed out to us from the white school. And that was better than, you know, nothing, not having books at all in the school. But I just didn't have that little help, and that was other children that was slower than I was that didn't get help and what have you.* (Laura)

Laura said she "bluffed" her way through school. She graduated from high school but has struggled with reading and spelling all her life. Elizabeth and Marvin both left school before high school to go to work. All the participants in this study, by definition, had problems with literacy, but Elizabeth, Marvin, and Laura seem to have had the most difficulty reading and writing as adults. While we do not want to generalize from three examples, it seems likely that the schooling they received was more limited than that of the younger and white participants, and that they have had to pay the price of inadequate schooling all their lives. As Elizabeth put it, "It just don't make sense."

Family

> *All my family is close, you know. If I have a toothache, everybody in my family knows about it - that's how close we are.* (Kris)

Family connections are important to the people in this study. Of the nine with siblings, seven see at least one sibling regularly. Laura and Ruth both live far from their brothers and sisters, but keep in touch by phone and letters. Marvin, who has no siblings, visits his mother nearly every day. Bert lives with his mother, and the other four participants with living parents live near their parents and see them regularly. When talking about family, Kris and Bert both described close relationships with nephews.

These interactions with family include getting together for social occasions and recreation. Will and his brother go to NASCAR races together. Elizabeth travels with her sister, visiting other siblings in distant states. Harry and his brother eat out together several times a week.

Family members also give each other day-to-day support. June and her sister study together for their correspondence course. Kris gets help with her children from her parents and sisters. Elizabeth's sister drives her to church. Suzanne is estranged from her sister, but is happy that her sister spends time with her (Suzanne's) children, taking them to museums and other places that Suzanne is not able to.

> *And me and her may have our conflicts, but she tells me, she says, "I love you." I say, "I know you do in your own way," and I love her in my own way. But she really loves my children, and I am grateful for that, I really am.* (Suzanne)

Merrifield and her colleagues (1997) found a similar closeness of family among the Appalachian participants in their study. Fingeret (1982, 1983) also found close networks that included family members among people with limited literacy In a city in the northeast United States. In the next two sections we will explore participants' relationships with their spouses and children.

Marriage

Marriage has provided both love and support and "a lot of resentment and hatred" for the adults in this study. All but Bert have been married. Four live with a spouse, Marvin and Suzanne in a second marriage. Will and Ruth are the only two who are still living with their first spouse.

Seven of the group have been divorced or separated. Their stories are varied; some talked in some detail about what had happened, others not. Harry, Kris (whose husband is in prison), Laura, Suzanne, and June have all been faced with raising their children as a single parent. Suzanne and Laura had their adult education interrupted by partners who resented the time spent in classes. In Laura's case threats from her second husband against her children made her afraid to leave them. Elizabeth talked about being separated from her second husband:

> *See I don't like no man to talk loud with me. And I sure don't want him to put his hands on me... Rather be myself, honey. Me and my God, we been having a good time. I like to be by myself.* (Elizabeth)

At this point in their lives Will, Ruth, and Marvin are in marriages they describe as supportive and amicable. Harry has a long-term relationship with a woman friend with whom he shares many activities, from mowing her lawn to attending concerts in Nashville. Suzanne is working to sustain her second marriage. Laura and June have cordial relationships with the fathers of their children even though they are divorced or separated.

Children

All the participants but Bert have children. Ruth, Elizabeth, Harry, and Marvin have grand-children, and Elizabeth has great-grandchildren. Kris, Suzanne, and June have school-age children at home, and Marvin and his wife care for young foster children. Laura, Will, and Marvin have children in college as well as adult children. Harry, Ruth, and Elizabeth's children are all adults. The ages and gender of the children and their schooling are outlined in Table 7.

Table 7: Number and ages of children

Name	Children	Children's schooling
Bert	No children	
Elizabeth	Four adult daughters; two other daughters deceased	All six graduated from high school; two were in college
Harry	Two adult daughters	Both graduated; one has been to college
June	Two daughters ages 5 and 16	One in high school; one in pre-school
Kris	Daughter age 10; two sons ages 9 and 11	All three in elementary school
Laura	Daughter and son in their twenties	Both graduated and attend college
Marvin	Two daughters and three sons, all adult; also foster children	Three children have been to college
Ruth	One daughter in her twenties	Dropped out in twelfth grade
Suzanne	Three daughters: two in their early teens, and a four-year-old	Two daughters in middle school and one in pre-school
Will	Adult son, and daughter about 20 years old	Both graduated, and the daughter is attending college

Their children have been a focal point for this group, and as they talked about their lives, they told about both their concerns and their pride for their children. Those with older children are proud of having raised them, of how they have "turned out." Those with children at home are concerned about being able to provide for their physical needs and concerned about protecting them from the dangers they see in their world. All have thoughts and opinions on how children should be brought up, including supporting their education.

Of the twenty-six children of these ten people, eighteen are older than eighteen. Of these eighteen, only one, Ruth's daughter, did not graduate from high school. Eight have at least some college. Their parents feel a sense of accomplishment in their children's educational success. Their adult children are living independently and comfortably and have more education than their parents. Their parents see their children as successful members of their communities and attribute this at least in part to their own efforts as parents.

> *Yeah, that's something else I realized. Anybody that's in a divorced family, well, ... kids needs mother and dad both at home. And it was hard on me, I wasn't making any money much and paying a babysitter, and they didn't have what they needed and really wanted, but they had it a lot better than I had. At least, I bought a new home and we all had our own bedrooms, it was 3-bedroom. So, that's the only thing I tell them now, say, you all might give up a lot of things but, at least you had your own*

bedrooms, you always had plenty to eat, it might not have been the best, and you had clothes, it might not been the best, but you had more than I had. And so, I guess, they are trying to see that their kid gets more than what they had. But, like I say, I had some tough times in my lifetime but everything's all right now. (Harry)

I seem to have raised a pretty level-headed bunch. That's what makes me happy. I ain't got none that have done stoled or knocked somebody in the head or killed two or three peoples. And I'm glad of that. They stayed away from that, and I'm so glad of that. Cause we've got so many here that's starting out on the wrong feet, robbing and killing folks. So I'm just glad mine didn't, how they growed up. I teached them the right way to wherever they get, they need to work for it. If they wanted something, ask for it, don't take it. That's they way I taught them. I've got a pretty decent batch of children, put it that way. (Marvin)

But my son, he has done real good. He's one that didn't have to keep his nose in a book, you know what I mean. It just come natural to him. And [my daughter], she is one that wants most to stay in books. I mean she'll come home [from university] on weekends and she'll sit up all night long, a lot of times, way up in the morning, working on her books and stuff, which I'm proud. (Will)

I said the same thing when I was a little child. I said whenever I get, if I ever do get grown and have any children, I said my children ain't gonna pick cotton like this. I said, I'm gonna let my children go to school. I said it and I meant it. Every one of my children went to school and finished high school. Some have been to college. That's right! (Elizabeth)

I am very proud of my daughter, the way she grew up. We did not have any problems with her. She doesn't even smoke. And she always did fine. She married this guy who is really nice. He doesn't drink, takes good care of her and the babies. (Ruth)

For those with children still in school, concerns are still prevalent. June, Kris, and Suzanne are all involved in their children's education, talking to their teachers, monitoring home work, reading to the little ones. They worry about providing for their children and protecting them.

I mean, my kids, we are not going to live where we are at for all the rest of my life, you know. I want to get the kids whatever they want, and I can't do it without a GED and a good job. (Kris)

Around here, it's not gangs around here, it's drug dealers and prostitutes. And [my daughter] would tell you, "If my mama sees you selling drugs, that's it. She'll go after you with a stick." Because I don't want them around my kids, and I told them I won't appreciate them doing it around my kids. And I'll call the law. (June)

The participants who still have young children structured much of their lives around meeting their children's needs.

How to raise children. Bringing up children was one of the topics people focused on in their interviews. The participants told us about doing things with their children, and they offered their opinions on how children should be raised. Because, as described by Auerbach (1995), parenting skills of people with limited formal education are sometimes called into question, we will spend some space on how these nine parents addressed raising their children. We return to this topic in the final section of this paper.

The group described parenting practices that include awareness of the need to protect their children, a need to provide discipline and a sense of responsibility, and a commitment to their children's education and learning.

Several people spoke of the need to provide an environment for children where they are safe. They talked about protection from harsh language as well as from physical danger. Elizabeth and Kris spoke of the importance of the words children hear.

I guess it's the way you treat them. The way you treat the children, that's the way they're gonna treat you, you know. Treat them good when they're children, they're gonna treat you right when they get bigger. You ain't have no problem with that. You don't say anything in front of your children, do anything in front of your children, you ain't gonna have no problem. Now a whole lot of people have a lot of problem with their children because they've done so many things in front of them. Cuss them out, cuss one another, you know what I'm saying. "I say what I want to say in my house." You can't say what you want to say in your house, in

front of your children you can't. A whole lot of people don't know that. (Elizabeth)

They never see me arguing, I don't argue in front of my kids. And if somebody else is arguing, they don't understand it. I say, well, it's just a little argument, just go on and play. So, I don't____ No bad language, no arguing that I do. They may hear a word from neighbors or somebody. They'd come directly and ask me, "What is this word?" And I'll say, "OK, we don't say this word", and I'll explain it to them, you know, but that's the end of it. (Kris)

June, too, tries to protect her children, keeping them off the streets when drug users are around. She also punishes them when she thinks they need it, even when their father objects.

No, I don't spank my kids. I won't spank my kids. Punish, you know. I take my oldest girl's phone away from her. That's how I get her. My youngest one, you say, "corner", and she knows what it means, "go to corner and stand." He thought it was wrong for me to punish them and discipline, you know. But he wasn't here to see what I see them doing. (June)

Another theme was teaching children to be responsible. Several people described teaching their children to take care of themselves, to value work, and to follow the rules they had established. From their descriptions, we do not get a sense of children growing up without structure or supervision.

But I tried to teach my kids that responsibility, and I never did make my youngest daughter but my oldest daughter, she was making 72 dollars a week. And she had her own bedroom, and all of her food, and I bought her a old jalopy car, and I told she's aiming to have to give me 10 dollars a week. Well, we had a lot of hassle over that. And that was our biggest argument. But I was just trying to learn her responsibility. (Harry)

If I am having spaghetti for supper, I'll say: "[Son], you know, go cook some spaghetti". And he will have it done. So, I'm teaching them, mainly my boys. [My daughter], she don't really want to do it. She is at that stubborn stage. But my boys, they can, you know, some things they can't cook and sometimes they can. Just depending on what it is. Now I have a rule about that. If I am not in the house, they don't touch the oven. I have to know when they are doing something like that, you know. And they

pretty much, they'll say, "Mom, I want to make me a grilled cheese" - "OK, be careful", you know, because I have a gas stove. (Kris)

I mean there's difference in getting a whipping and getting beat. I mean you know, you've gotta correct them. But that's one thing that I didn't have to do a whole lot of mine. When I spoke, they listened. Because when my dad spoke, I listened. I knew by the tone of his voice when he meant it. No, my son, I had to go one time and get him. And that's what they were doing, ... they're sitting down here at the service station with a bunch of boys, just a going on, you know, forget about the time. And it just got him bad. I didn't mind. "You know what time it is, son?" "No, I don't, Dad." I said, "Well look at your watch." I said, "I'm going back home and I'm expecting you to be behind me." And he come in and he apologized. (Will)

I know children they need to work, all children need to work coming up. Cause that's the only way they are going to learn how to work. But that don't mean you keep your child out of school to work, you know what I'm saying? I didn't do it, because I'd never keep my child out of school to work. (Elizabeth)

As their parents described it, the children of the people in this study grew up (or are growing up) in homes with adequate food, clothing, and shelter, in homes with structure and expectations. These were also homes where education is valued and supported in various ways. Four parents talked about visiting their children's schools. Laura, Suzanne, and June each worked with the schools to get an appropriate education for their child with special needs. Kris and Laura talked about helping their children with schoolwork, at least in the early grades. Several others talked about the learning activities they did with their children.

My daughter, I could help her to a certain point in her classes of schooling, from elementary to high school. Elementary, I did pretty good with helping them. And after it got to a certain point, I couldn't and that's when I reached out into the school system, and they would help my children with what they were having difficulty, and especially my son, he have a learning disability. (Laura)

My oldest son doesn't need no help [with homework] at all. He just whizzes through it like nothing. Every now and then my daughter will say, you know, "Explain this to me", and I go and explain it to her. My

> *youngest son, he always needs help. I make them explain it to me, to see if they know how to do it, and if they do, I say - well, just do it that way each time, and then you'll get it right on the nose.* (Kris)

> *On Sundays, that was my regular routine when the kids was small, is going to the beach. You'd take them out there and walk the beaches, and watch everything that's going on, and it didn't cost you anything much unless you bought a cold drink or a hot dog or something. They had one place up there, Bell Isle, you'd go across a long bridge getting to an island, and you could- they had a lot of things, you could see the big boats, and everything going up and down the river, and then the river went out in the lake.* (Harry)

Marvin talked about reading to his foster children even though he had been unable to read to his own children. June read to her youngest daughter, improving her own reading in the process. Suzanne also talked about reading to her daughters. As they recognized a need for learning and education in their own lives, they fostered education in their children.

Health

In the course of our conversations, each person had something to say about their health. Often this was in the context of why they were not working or had stopped attending ABE classes. Both Marvin and June cited health reasons for not attending classes. Bert, Marvin, Laura, and Kris all had health problems that had interfered with their ability to work. Ruth and Elizabeth named problems, tendonitis and rheumatism, that may well have been a result of work. Some of the health problems mentioned by each participant are listed in Table 8.

Table 8: Health Problems

Participant	Health Problem
Bert	Back problems; neck problems
Elizabeth	Legs hurt; arms hurt
Harry	Heart bypass operation; pneumonia
June	Diabetic
Kris	Chronic digestive disease
Laura	High blood pressure; depression; back and hip pain
Marvin	Heart problem; back pain
Ruth	Tendonitis; arthritis; cancer
Suzanne	Weight problem in the past
Will	Arthritis

While all of the group named at least one health problem, this incidence may have been affected by the age of the group (median, 45.9 in 1998). Their access to health care varies. At least two (June, Kris) are covered by Tenncare, Tennessee's Medicaid program. Elizabeth and Harry are eligible for Medicare. Ruth and Will have health insurance as an employee benefit. Laura goes to an

interfaith clinic operated for low-income people. Suzanne is covered by her husband's insurance. We do not have information for Marvin or Bert.

Leisure Activities

You can make it dull, or you can make it a little more spicier or whatever you want to call it. (Harry)

Harry's approach to dealing with retired life typifies the way the people in this group approach lives that have not always been easy, but that are full. Family activities and work fill much of their everyday lives, but all had other activities as well, things they did for enjoyment.

I love to swim. I haven't been this year, but hopefully before it gets too cold, I will go swim. There's a community center, about twenty minutes drive, where there is a pool and everything. (Bert)

We got about four or five [retired men] around there and we all get together and talk about old times and, uh, talk about the jobs we used to work and different things. And it's a lot of relaxation doing that. And then we, I got a lot of old guys crack jokes and everybody get to laughing and when you laugh, it really do something for you when you get a good laugh in. (Marvin)

I talked to some nuts [on an Internet chat line], now. But I've met a lot of people, you can send pictures back and forth. I've met a husband and wife team. I even met somebody in person that I've talked to. She lives in U____, Tennessee, and at the time I was only, like, 5 miles away from her. So, you know, we've met. (Kris)

[I read] Sometimes romance novels, and mysteries and scary novels and mysteries and all that good stuff. But sometimes I read sometimes, when I have the time, you know. (Suzanne)

I play a guitar, you know, but I don't know a lick of music. Well, all of them in our family but my youngest brothers plays some kind of musical instrument. I'm not no fancy picker or nothing, but I play a lot with

people, you know. I play a lot in church. Singers, and I used to travel around with the group that sang, and I enjoy it. (Will)

The activities people mentioned doing in their free time are summarized in the table below. It is notable that six people spoke of reading in their free time. Kris's on-line chats, following sports, using woodworking patterns, and other activities like shopping also involved literacy uses.

Table 9: Leisure Time Activities

Walking, exercise, swimming	Bert, Suzanne, Laura, June
Watch/follow sports	Bert, Harry, Marvin, Will
Go out with friends, family	Elizabeth (zoo, casino), Bert (clubs, swimming, park), Harry (movies, concerts), Ruth (fishing, park, movies)
Hobbies	Harry (woodcraft), June (collect unicorns), Ruth (crochet), cars (Will)
Computers	Kris (on-line chat groups)
Shopping	Ruth, Suzanne
Reading	Suzanne, Harry, Bert, Laura, Elizabeth and Will
Visiting family	Suzanne, June, Elizabeth
Playing music	Will

Travel is another activity that several participants enjoy. Elizabeth, Harry, Will, Marvin, and Kris have all traveled to several states. June has never been out of east Tennessee, but she would like to travel:

I'd like to go, you know, just one time to go, like, to California, something like that, you know, different state. You see it on TV, and you really don't understand because you're not there, no where that place is. Not ... just look and see, you know, what it's like there. See if different people have their attitude... (June)

As they talked about traveling, no one mentioned any issues around

difficulties resulting from lack of literacy skills. The barriers to travel, when they existed, seemed to be lack of opportunity, time, or money.

Church

Church is an important site for social life in Tennessee, and many people are active church members. This is the case for six of the people in this study. Ruth, Kris, June, and Suzanne do not attend church. The rest do. The church is important as a site of social activity; their faith is important as a source of support. As we discuss in the section on literacy practices, there is an important intersection of religion and text in people's lives.

> *And if it weren't for my church, to sing in the choir, go to Bible study, prayer meeting, and work with the children and go to different places with the choir to sing, and the church, Sunday school people, what have you, I would probably have lost my mind by now.* (Laura)

Will and Marvin both help with construction and maintenance at their churches. Harry named a religious experience as one of the best moments of his life.

> *When I was eighteen years old, I accepted the Lord as my Savior. And that means more to me now than anything else. But thinking for the here after, anybody is going to have ups and downs through life, even money don't make you happy. But I never had that much money to count my happiness on money. But I don't know, that's been about the highest thing.* (Harry)

Laura, Elizabeth, and Will also talked about religion as a source of direction and support.

Civic Activity

There has been public concern in recent years about the lack of civic involvement among adults in the United States (see for example, Putnam, 1995). While the participants in this study might not be activists, most of them are active as citizens in at least some ways. In work on the activities of citizens, the Center for Literacy Studies (1996) found that people defined citizenship as taking action. These actions can be placed on two continua according to whether they are individual or group, and whether they are focused on personal impact or

institutional change. Most of the civic action of the participants in this study are individual actions. The civic actions people named tended to be quite local. They watched out for their neighbors or helped at their churches.

> *Everybody takes care of each other. She keeps an eye on my apartment when I'm not there, and I keep an eye on hers. I'm not afraid somebody's going to come in and take it or anything, but that's just how it works.* (Kris)

Harry and Marvin were active as recruiters for their adult education programs, and Marvin encouraged children to stay in school

> *I guess you would say that I was recruiting people that couldn't read and write. That was what I would do. And I also would make trips to different schools to tell children about education, to stay in school and get a good education and not drop out. Because, I'd always, I'd let them look back at my history, how I come up. And try to get to them to stay in school and do better than I did. And, but that's what I taught when I was going to school. I would go to different schools and teach that. Teach them that staying in school, get a good education and when you come out you can get a job, a good job. And you won't have to drive tractor or plow mules for a living. So that's what I taught them, so the ones that I did go to. And I've got children come up to me right now where I went, always talk to me about why I stopped out. One time or another I was actually going to different meetings and things in Nashville and different other things picking up different stuff and literature and stuff and bringing back here for my teachers and things.* (Marvin)

Organizational activity, except for church membership, does not seem to have been very important to this group. Harry and Ruth have been union members, but do not seem to have been very active. Harry is a member of American Association of Retired Persons, but only mentioned getting the magazine. Marvin, however, is a member of a foster parents' organization, and he and his wife attend meetings across the state. He was the only person who talked about this kind of civic activity.

Voting is another aspect of civic involvement. For the most part our information about voting comes from the earlier Tennessee Longitudinal Study. In interviews for that study, Bert, Harry, Elizabeth, Laura, and Marvin all said they had voted in a recent election. Ruth and Will were registered, but had not voted.

In the interviews for our current study, Suzanne talked about a local election, but did not plan to vote.

> *Yeah, I'm hoping that we'll get this new sheriff. He's a black man, and he's real nice, and there is a lot of other candidates running, but, you know, this man seems like he knows what he's talking about. So I hope that he will get elected. And I'm not voting. I am registered to vote, but I am not voting, but if I was, I would sure vote for him.* (Suzanne)

When we asked Suzanne about voting, she said it had been five years since she had voted and that she might vote. She did not offer any reason why she hadn't voted. It is interesting to note that the four African-Americans in this group reported voting in a recent election, while only one of the six European-Americans (Harry) had.

All told us information about their communities that they have gained from experience and interactions with neighbors; most referred in their conversation as well to information gained from the media, from television or the newspapers.

Suzanne referred to reading the newspaper when she talked about problems she hoped the election of a new sheriff would help solve. Harry and Ruth also referred to the local paper as a source of information about their community.

> *It was in the newspaper, about a month ago, one guy who lives right around here, he had his four children for a weekend with him, and he took them to a barn and shot them. Told them to close their eyes, that there will be a surprise for them, and shot them. It was in our local paper. Everyone was talking about it.* (Ruth)

Everyone of the group mentioned reading the newspaper, but only these three (Suzanne, Harry, and Ruth) referred specifically to something they had read. Most of the information about their communities seemed to come from experience and local (non-published) knowledge. What they had to say about local issues tended to be a mix of information and opinion. For example, here are Elizabeth's thoughts on the neighborhood rehabilitation project that meant she was moving across town to a different housing project:

But if they ever get it fixed it's gonna be pretty. But they're moving mighty slow. I don't know, they might have run out of money. And they're supposed to fix [another area] up, too, you know. So. And they're already running out of money on that. They gotta wait on the contract or something they said. So I don't know. (Elizabeth)

Harry was the only person who made many references in his conversations with us to what might be called "national" knowledge. He talked about watching the O.J. Simpson trial. He referred to research about children when he talked about his own divorce.

I've heard it said that they've, well I don't know how they tell, but I mean by interviewing mothers and all, that the mothers say that their kids have got a better relationship or more settled down without, I mean after they are divorced than it was when they was fighting all the time with their husband. (Harry)

And when talking about the importance of an education for employment he referred to international issues.

And now, over there in Brazil, the way I get it, some of them people ain't making but just about what I was making when I was sixteen. They make ten or fifteen dollars a week. (Harry)

When we asked about issues or problems of concern to them, only Ruth referred to a national event. The others we asked mentioned local crime.

I was concerned about President Clinton, but I don't think he'd do it so-- I think she's [Monica Lewinsky] like that little boy with Michael Jackson, I think she's just wanting money... (Ruth)

Ruth also knew about a contamination problem that OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) had discovered in a chicken plant in Texas, but she probably learned this information because it meant she had to work overtime in her poultry processing job.

Table 10 summarizes the civic activities and sources of information of the participants in this study. The Action column includes civic activities participants mentioned; the next column includes civic topics discussed based on experiential knowledge, and the last column lists topics discussed based on media sources. While all participants access information through both local and experiential

sources, as well as from media, it is the experiential knowledge that seems to have more relevance to their civic activity.

Table 10: Civic participation/Civic knowledge

Name	Action	Experiential opinion/knowledge	Literate knowledge
Bert		Neighborhood - safe	No explicit references
Elizabeth	Neighborhood watch	Neighborhood activity - arrests, housing rehabilitation	- Church activities - Teenage pregnancy
Harry	Union membership; speech to Rotary club about ABE	About unions; Neighborhood activity - positive interactions and break-ins; Growth in nearby city	- O.J. trial - Jonbenet Ramsey - Wages in Brazil - Effect of divorce on kids - Low literacy in HS grads - Local news: murder, robberies - Drug problems - Minimum wages rate - Social Security benefits
June	Told drug dealers to stay away from kids	Bad neighborhood, school integration, gangs	Life in other countries
Laura	Church: choir, babysitting	Neighborhood problems Drugs and political corruption	No explicit references
Kris	Keep track of neighbors	Neighborhood	No explicit references
Marvin	Recruit for ABE; foster parent; repairs at church	Other foster parents; Lack of space and books in local ABE program	Youth problems
Ruth	Union member; watch out for neighbors	Union activities; OSHA problems at other chicken plants	President Clinton's and Michael Jackson's alleged sexual misconduct
Suzanne		Drugs and guns, "crookedness" of the old sheriff, friend's story about a welfare worker	- Local sheriff's election - Local robberies - High school shootings
Will	Repair at church; neighborhood watch	Junk cars in neighborhood; changes in farm economics	Vietnam war

Summary

To summarize our findings on the everyday lives of this group of ten Tennesseans:

- Their lives were in many ways ordinary-- they held jobs, raised children, live comfortably.
- They live in housing that is decent to good, but the younger ones hope for better for their children as much as for themselves.
- While they are not impoverished today, the older participants had impoverished childhoods and all have struggled to make ends meet.
- The three that attended seriously underfunded "Colored" schools have paid a heavy price.
- These ten adults continue to be close to their birth families, physically and otherwise.
- Divorce is nearly as common as marriage for this group.
- Raising a total of twenty-six children (as well as foster children and grandchildren) has been or continues to be a major activity and focus.
- Only one of these twenty-six children has dropped out of high school; eight have attended college.
- The group is concerned that their children grow up in a good environment, learn to be responsible, and get a good education.
- Everyone has had health problems, in some instances debilitating.
- Each person has activities they do for pleasure; these include a wide range of activities.
- Church is important in the lives of six of the group.
- The civic participation of this group is primarily, but not exclusively, local and informal. Their civic knowledge seems to come from experience as much as from media.

This is the everyday life that provides the context in which many of the outcomes of literacy learning occur. The other major context is work, discussed in the next chapter.

Section 6: Work Life

Much of what people talked to us about centered on their work lives. The recently passed Workforce Investment Act has intensified the focus of the adult basic educators on employment as both content and result. We, too, will focus a major part of this report on employment -- the nature of people's work lives, how they learned their jobs, and the impact of their literacy on getting decent work. We will return to this topic in the next section on literacy practices and as we consider impacts of adult basic education.

All of the people in this study have worked at least two jobs; Laura and Harry each had seven. Five have worked many (12- 29) years at one job. Among them they named 40 different jobs that they have held: 16 in service and retail, 19 in manufacturing and construction, and five in agriculture and food products. While three are now retired, the rest are either working (4) or hoping to work (3). The three who are not working all have health problems that limit what they are able to do.

Table 11: Jobs or Work People Mentioned Doing (Does not include unpaid work in home)

Elizabeth	field work in cotton beauty shop restaurant, dishwasher - 29 years
Suzanne	winding water hose in a factory. packing lingerie dishwashing, catering product re-labeling brickmason's helper
Kris	chicken plant assistant manager, pizza restaurant
Laura	cleaning houses thermostat factory daycare worker nursing home assistant University of Tennessee housekeeping bait factory garment factory sewer department store clerk cook, deli and school cafeteria
June	nursing home kitchen motel cleaning life jacket manufacturer
Ruth	chicken plant -12 years
Bert	warehouse work: packing and receiving, bubble gum, sportswear factory janitor in mall
Marvin	field work, cotton tractor mechanic and truck driver - 26 years
Harry	grocery clerk harness shop defense factory construction, building power lines auto parts plant, buffer - 22 years lumber yard auto parts plant, driver - 15 years
Will	farm work, tobacco garage upholstering stove works – 18 years build customized vehicle interiors

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People's Work Lives

For the three older men, work is or has been a source of pride and satisfaction. Marvin worked as a mechanic and truck driver for a local farm equipment dealer. He told us, "Every morning I got up, I wanted to work." He left the job when his poor health made it impossible to continue. Harry talked about being a good worker and being called back three times after he retired to help train others.

> *This is my home town but I went to Michigan in 1952 and went to work up there in a factory. And I worked for 22 and a half years, and I missed seven days work. And so when the plant closed there, well they wanted to send me to Alabama, as a foreman, and I wanted to come back here. And so I came back here in 75, went to work at E____ in 76.*
> *[In Michigan] we made moldings for the Big 3. Car moldings on the inside and outside and all that. And I was a buffer and polisher. And on the last, I was a leader in my department. And then go back from that, I was on construction work for about 5 years, and then back past that, I was in Michigan -- where I may be getting the days a little bit off, but during the war I was in Michigan working on a defense plant. And before that I went to work at 16 in a harness shop here in S_____. So I had 2 years there and about 4 years in Michigan and 5 years in construction and 22 and a half years at one place, and then from 76 until 90 I worked at E____ Corporation. And so I've been back 3 times in the last 7 years or 6-7.*

For many of the women work has been more a necessity than a pleasure. They can imagine and hope for work that pays well and that they enjoy, but jobs washing dishes, housekeeping, or cleaning chickens are what they have done. Elizabeth worked twenty-nine years in a Memphis restaurant.

> *There wasn't [nothing] I didn't do, but wash dishes, and make salad and cook and everything else -- for five dollar an hour. I'm gonna tell it like it is, five dollar an hour, yeah.*
>
> *That's enough to kill you. Walking around on that concrete floor, too. And some times we were really busy, now. Sometimes we weren't. But most times, we were real busy. And that woman , she want you to be-- You got something to do, you don't have time to eat lunch or whatever. You're just gonna work on through, you know what I'm saying. And when we weren't busy, didn't have too much to do, you know she don't want you to*

even take a break , Mrs. S_____ didn't. That woman was something! (Elizabeth)

Ruth told of being so cold from her job at a chicken plant that she is unable to go out again to class in the winter.

[My job is] clipping feathers. When the birds come down the line, they hang them on their legs, and on the wing, there's feathers on it, and I have to make sure that they are off the bird, or back of the wing, or the tail of it. They's a oil bag on it; I got to clip the whole tail off because they say it's got poison or something in it.
They just keep on going, I mean, constant, they just keep moving. I got to grab it and clip it while it's still moving.

They's just one or two feathers on it when it comes to me, I mean it's fully clean, they just missed a feather on it or something, and they want to make sure the feather's off before it comes out of the plant. I used to stuff them. Put the liver and gizzard and heart, neck in it.

The benefits are good, it's just we have to work in cold all day. They say they have to keep it the certain temperature down there, you know_____. Seems like they keep it too cold and try to freeze us. The birds are already dead. I think they try to freeze us sometime. Sometimes it feels like about twenty [degrees]. It's cold. They've got freezer doors where they have to go in to get stuff out, and they leave these doors open about 10 or 15 minutes, and it gets really cold in there. And sometimes they've turned the air conditioner on in winter time.

I wear about two or three sweaters to work. And they got plastic sleeves where you can put on your arms to keep your sleeves, you know, down. You don't wear them, you got to roll your sleeves up. Sometimes it runs about 90 to 97 birds a minute. That, don't seem fast to you, but it is_____. Sometimes they cut it back to about 89 or 90.
[To take a break] well, I have to find somebody to take it, we have a lead person, I mean, what do you call the boys that go around? Floor boy or something, that will take your place to let you go to the bathroom.

We get two five minute breaks, five to seven minute breaks, and we get a thirty minute break in the morning, about 11:30. [The shift runs] from 6:15 to 3 o'clock. I usually get up at about 4 o'clock [a.m]

There are spurs in my neck, and tendentious in my shoulder. I think the tendentious has to do with doing this all day, all swelling in my fingers, this is from scissors.

They've got me a seat because I've got a bulging disk in my back, and the arthritis in the lower part, and sometimes I have to sit down. And sometimes I have to jump up out of the seat and run after my feathers to make sure that I got the bird. (Ruth)

Suzanne, too, talked about the cold and standing on concrete. She also mentioned not liking the solvents she used at work to clean recycled bottles. Laura described working in jobs where her pay was never figured accurately. And she told us about cleaning dorms after weekend parties.

And the only thing I knew how to do real well was housekeeping, and so I had dealt with that at UT, and what made me leave there was what little money I was getting paid, you had to buy your parking tickets and stuff. And I'm like: Gosh, they know we had to work back here, why not have a place for us, you know, everybody to have a free parking place. And we're not making much money, this is not even enough money to pay my bills and my rent and nothing, and then you're gonna take this back.
And then when I would go in to work housekeeping, when I was working in the boys' dorm, I would get sick because they would go and get drunk on the weekend, and on Monday here's all this throw-up, and here I am gagging myself and trying to deal with it, had my gloves and stuff, I still work with it. But to smell that, I had to get out of that room, and then get myself together to keep from throwing up myself, go back in there, you know, and had to deal with that. And then there would be some more little nasty stuff. And then some would be so beautiful to me, you know. One, that was doing these things, he never knew who was doing this but then there was guys that had to share bathrooms and things with others, and they would just leave me a very beautiful "thank you" note for coming in and cleaning up the mess that maybe their person they were sharing with, you know, cleaning up. And some would just see me in the hall there, you know, with pails and buckets and stuff, and thank me. And that made me feel good that I was at least doing something useful to help others, but that got on my nerves so bad, and the chemicals and stuff where I had to spray to try to disinfect stuff, was messing with me, and that real nasty stuff was nerving me so bad, and I had very bad nerve problems, and I ended up having to leave that. (Laura)

June's job in a nursing home kitchen is one she feels comfortable with, if not excited by.

> *Well, my job is to, like, we got a hot serving, we serve hot food to the patients, we take turns, people takes turn putting them on the plate, and then we work in dishes, cleaning the dishes up. And we serve the patients in the dining room. And basically, keep the kitchen clean, keep the snacks going to the patient at the right time they are supposed to get it.* (June)

Suzanne is an the exception among the women, having had a variety of factory jobs that she has enjoyed.

> *I like factory work, factory work. I am good with my hands, see. I worked at this place in A_____Tennessee. It was a sewing factory, and they made all kinds of panties and lingerie, things and stuff, and I never did sew because that's something I don't even want to learn to do. But I got in that field, and I used to tag the panties and I used to put them on the hangers, and bag them, and shipping, and handling, and I really enjoyed things like that. And then when I worked at P_____. Company with water hoses. It was really hard job, you know, some of them waterhoses got up to about a hundred pounds, you know, and you work with your upper arms and winding them on the big reel, and that's really, really heavy, and it's hard. But I didn't mind standing on my feet because I was always used to standing and working with my hands.* (Suzanne)

And Kris liked being the assistant manager at a pizza restaurant but was forced to quit due to health problems.

> *It's tough [to be an assistant manager]. It was... you got to make sure that other people come in. And if they don't, you got to make sure have backup. It's more or less like a manager job, but you don't have the authority to hire or fire, that's the only difference.*
> *Yeah, make sure it's, everything is set up for the morning, make sure that it's clean and stuff. I loved it.* (Kris)

Elizabeth is retired. All the other women hope for a different, better job.

Learning the Job

We heard rich descriptions of ways people learned to do their jobs. People made use of many of the same learning strategies that Merrifield, et al. (1997) identified for technology learning including observation, listening, cooperative learning, repetition and practice, and selective use of text. Marvin was able to use those strategies to learn "hands on" to be a mechanic and over-the-road truck driver for a local tractor firm.

> *[My boss] let me go on and do my level best, and always tried to help me in everything I did. And once that he get me where I could kind of help myself, he know that I was trying hard to pick up the things that other people was doing, so he started me out as a floor sweeper, from that to washing tractors. He would move me up, and he moved me up from washing tractors to a mechanic helper. Passing wrenches to the top mechanics. They learned me how to from one size wrench, from let's say 7/16 or 3/8, 9/16, 5/8, 3/4, half inch, inch and a half, 15/16, 2 and a half, they learned me, all the mechanics, learned me how to do that. They said: "Hand me such and such a wrench over there, that 3/4." I'd pick up the wrong wrench, they said: "No, 3/4. See, the one with the 3 and the 4 on it". So, they had learned me, all the mechanics that I worked with at J_____, learned me how to be able to pick the right wrench up to do the right job with. And I learned this on my own because I stored it. And I went from that to a mechanic myself. My shop manager, he is still shop manager up there. He's a ... he would turn me loose with things to work on, and I got so good at it, so he made me a mechanic. I went to school, like I said I couldn't read or write but they would show films and different things on the things, and I would sit there and watch the films, and then they would ask us to get up and do a hands-on, and I would go up and put it together because I stored it all up. My brain was so full of things that I done looked on that film up there that I can actually do it without even having to read anything. A lot of guys have got the book laying out, and he's reading it. I didn't have to have the book because I know, I've already seen, and I know what part went where. And that's how I got to be a mechanic. There's a lot of things that I didn't know, that I asked someone, and they always, the guys that I worked with, they were free to tell me: "Look, Marvin, this ain't right, this goes right there". OK, and I put it there, that's where it go.*

Marvin learned to drive a truck from the man he replaced. He was able to overcome the literacy challenges of the job, for example, keeping a log book.

> *So, he learned me, he put me on the truck, took me with him and learned me how to drive the truck, and I went from there. I used to work my log books. But I've learned that by watching other peoples. In a log book, say, destination - Centerville. Say, when you start, you start, say, off duty from here. Say, you're getting in your truck, start right there. You come up off duty and go up on in truck. You run four hours, say that take you from here over to....., let's say four hours, from here to, I'd say Effingham, Illinois, running up 57. You get there, the truck stops, you stop. Go out of the truck. You go back on a sleeper bay. That's going into sleep. You're not allowed to drive but four hours. You off one hour. You just go into the sleeper bay for 1 hour. Which you don't go in the sleeper, it just says that. Then you comes up out of the sleeper bay after you stayed there that 1 hour, you go back and you drive four more hours. You're allowed to drive eight hours out of a day but you can drive nine. But you got to have three or four breaks out of that whole eight or nine hours.*
> *All those times. Even every time you stop. And when you stop that night, you come out of the truck and go back into sleeper bay until the next morning. Then you get up, get back on the road again, you go back on the truck. See, every place that you stop, you got to mark down. Every mile, say it was, you left J_____, it was 230 miles across yonder, when you get over there, you've got to write this down.*
>
> *That's how I learned to write everything down: by watching somebody. They gave me a dummy log book, and I watched them doing this, and a lot of guys would show me how to do it. Cause there's some real nice truckers out there that I've run with, especially from J_____. And that's how I learned.* (Marvin)

Marvin worked until his health made it unsafe for him to be a driver and unable to be a mechanic. After his forced retirement, he enrolled in an ABE program.

Will described using blueprints in his job building customized bus interiors:

> *And I had fooled around some of them blueprints some, you know. Then when I went to work up here, we had a class every so often, we'd go through and go through the blueprints showing all the things in it. And it, you know, just, just to go through it for a little few minutes at a time, you pick up on things, you know, that you don't normally do every day. Just like in school, you know. It's been so long since I've been. But the blueprints, I can go through the blueprints and make the materials whatever they want, you know. The bends, and degree, and setups and all that. And, you know, it's real particular work that I do because if you don't get it bent, parts that I bend that goes on the seat, that they go together, if you don't get them right, they don't fit.*
>
> *It's all the stuff that we build, you know, it's by a print. It's got to be within specs and you've got so much tolerance, you know, and everything. And you don't go over it. It'll come back on you. Or under it.*
>
> *Yeah, you've got your degree, so many degree, you know, you bend on which we've got the, you know, everything to do this, and you've got your meters to tell the, like how m... inch, and so much whatever they go by, you got to, you got these you go by and a tape, you use tape measures a lot. And you've got to get down to the hundredths of an inch and all that to get the stuff. That's where the tools all come in handy. So, it's... common sense will take you a long way, but you've got to have a little bit out there, too, to pull you through it, too. Now, there's some people that draw blueprints that it's hard to read, you know. I mean, there's certain ways they're supposed to be drawed up, and some people's got their own ways. And I have had to go back, "Hey, what is this?" But it, you know, after you once see what they are doing, well you can pretty well go with it. There's some things that, new parts that like comes out, and they'll hand you a blueprint and say, "The metal will be there, we need this, build us so many samples," you know, whatever. And they just bring the raw material down there, lay it down with a piece of paper, and you make something out of it. But it's interesting, I like it.* (Will)

When Suzanne was between factory jobs, she worked with her husband, who took extra work as a bricklayer. She described how she was learning to lay

brick, through observation and practice. She also emphasized the importance of determination.

> *Well, just like when I am with Roy, what I do is I watch him. And he'll tell me, he'd say, "Now you do it." I've watched him long enough now, what he does to the brick or to the block. I can't lift the block because they are 6 to 8 to 12 inch blocks, and they are heavy, so I don't go there with that. But the brick I can pretty well pick it up. I can't put the mortar on the brick to let it stay like he can, because he's had so, so many years of experience. But I am learning each day that I'm watching him because I know how it's supposed to sit, I know if it's level on the level, I know if it's plumb, I know if it's straight up and down. I know if the wall is leaning, if it's got a bow or a hog in the wall, which he's taught me a lot. And, like, this morning, we went to, we laid about 1400 brick in a house, they built an addition on to their house, them people. And we, I helped him. I helped him with all of it. Now, I only laid 5 brick in them, because he was just teaching me, but it was interesting to do. I got frustrated one time. I said, "I can't do this" because the mortar kept coming off of the brick, and he can just hold the brick and he can do this, and it's just like, so. To him, of course. But when you do it yourself, I can't do it. But I can put that level up on that wall, and I know where the level mark is, so I think, the more and more I watch him, I can do it. So, it's pretty interesting.*
>
> *I brushed the wall. You take a brush and you just, like, you just brush it, you know.*
>
> *And they got all kinds of joints, roller-skate joints, and all that. So I know how to do that, too. So_____, that was new, it was complicated at first. But a lot of women don't -- wouldn't or attempt or wouldn't like to know what he does. A lot of women wouldn't attempt it because it is hard work. It's hard, it's hot outside, and a lot of women wouldn't want to do it.*

> *I am determined because when I put my head at something, I'm gonna learn how to do it. That's just like that job. I got, you know, production, and I was a hard worker. And they knew I was, and they liked me. So, when I put my mind to something, I pretty well want to know how to do it. A lot of other people would just say, "No, I don't want to do that", and give up. I'm not like that. But I want to do it right, too. If you are going to do something, do it right, don't do it at all. You know.*

People described using a variety of strategies to learn what they needed to know to do their jobs. They also talked about what they did not need to know in

order to do their work, and how, in some instances, what they did not know interfered with their ability to get the job they wanted. But for others, the barrier to better employment seemed to be not lack of skills, but lack of credential.

Getting/Keeping Employment

In general, people were able to do the jobs they had including the reading and writing they encountered. Ruth and Elizabeth said they had no reading or writing in their jobs.

> *You didn't have to be no good reader to work down there, you just know the food, you know what I'm saying? And know what to do. But as far as being a good reader, you didn't have to do that.*

> *I didn't have to do no writing. See we had waiters out there. The waiters when they come and took the order, they just write. But you need to know how to read what they write. Some of the people out there couldn't read what they write, but they couldn't write no way. No. I never had to write.* (Elizabeth)

But Marvin and Laura spoke of being limited by lack of literacy skills in their employment, Marvin because he could not become a supervisor and Laura due to her difficulties spelling. This has caused both of them considerable pain.

> *Let me say this. If I had been able to read and write better when I was at J___, it could've moved me up in a better position, better spots, slowed down running because I could have been a shop manager. But when you do not have the education, you can't be a shop manager because you have so many manuals, and different diagrams and stuff you've got to study. You've got to be able to go to different meetings and got to be able to talk to your guys that's out there in the middle of the shop, and stuff like that. That's some of the reason that had bothered me because I could never -- I could go so far and then stop, I couldn't go any further. I can drive a truck, be a mechanic. But when it start going into being a shop manager, or a territory manager, actually being a assistant shop manager, I could not be that because I didn't have the education. Now that's what I am really talking about. I wanted to move up in that bracket. After I got out of the truck, that's what I wanted to do, be an assistant shop manager. But I couldn't do it, couldn't read. That's one of them, you know, the point I'm trying to make. I've done a lot of things before I got into adult education.*

But that's what encouraged me to go on and get into adult education, because of the things I had already missed. I had missed what I wanted to move into. I've got most of the things I wanted. But barely did them because education was setting in with everybody, where you had to be able to read and write. As years moved on, things got more complicated. And if you couldn't read and write, you couldn't even, you had to be on the tail end of things. And that's what bothered me after I came out. I wanted so bad to move to a higher position. I was even asked to be a shop manager, but I couldn't take that spot because I didn't have what it takes to do it. (Marvin)

I know there is a lot of things that I can do in this world, but I feel confined because of my spelling, my reading, especially my spelling. Because even when there have been jobs come through in the past where I could answer telephone and take notes, I couldn't do it because I didn't know how to spell that well, for, you know, to pass them along to my boss. And I was getting very nervous. Even when I took the nursing assistant, if you had to take notes and write about your patients and what happened for the day. And then it come to the place where I don't know how to spell this, I'm getting nervous and tense, and that worked on my nervous system. (Laura)

While limited literacy abilities hampered Marvin and Laura, for most it has not been lack of skills but lack of credentials, lack of a high school or GED diploma, that has been a barrier to a better job. Ruth would like to get out of the chicken factory, or to become a supervisor, but needs a GED for a different job. Will had a job as a mechanic for a few days until his new employer discovered he did not have a GED or a diploma. He was eventually able to get his current job, but drives many miles each day and works so many hours he cannot continue the adult education he had begun. Kris and Bert both want training in computers, but need a GED first. Meanwhile, they are not physically able to do the jobs that they can get without a GED.

Harry and Marvin doubt they could get the jobs they had if they were entering the job market today. Elizabeth urged her daughters to finish school so they wouldn't have to work as hard as she had.

That's what I tell all my children, I tell them, I say now you all ain't gonna be as lucky as I was. I was lucky to get a job. I said but you all ain't gonna just get a job like I had and have to do everything on a job, you

know what I'm saying? You ain't gonna want to do everything on a job you know, and then get no money for it no way, you know what I'm saying? I said you all ain't gonna want to do that stuff. When you all come out of this high school, you all need to go right on to college or else go somewhere and get you a good training. That's the only way you all get a good job. I said because you all ain't gonna want to do these things I'm doing. Just work here, just work all day, ain't doing nothing, ain't getting no money. (Elizabeth)

This group believes that regardless of the skills needed for a job -- and some did talk about increasing skill levels -- educational credentials are necessary to get good jobs.

Summary

To summarize our findings on work:

- Everyone had worked for wages in a wide variety of jobs.
- About half expressed satisfaction with their work.
- At least half had done disagreeable and difficult work for at least some of their work life.
- Learning new work has been an exciting challenge for some.
- People used a variety of learning strategies at work.
- Limited literacy has been a challenge, but not an insurmountable one.
- Lack of credentials, particularly the GED, has been a greater challenge to a better job and secondary credentials are seen by all as a necessity for a good job today.

Paid work has been a part of the lives of all participants. They have used a variety of strategies including literacy skills to learn their jobs. Limited literacy skills have been a barrier for some and lack of a secondary credential for others. The relationship of literacy skills, credentials, and employment is neither simple nor direct.

Section 7: Literacy Practices

In this section we examine the literacy practices that the participants talked about using in their lives. We first discuss what we mean by literacy practices. Then we report our findings about the literacy practices reported by the participants. Finally we look at changes they reported both in skills and in practices.

What Do We Mean by Literacy Practices

Lytle and Wolfe (1989) describe the various ways adult literacy practitioners define literacy. Defining literacy as a skill is the view that literacy is a set of discrete skills for encoding and decoding words. Literacy tasks are the ability to apply skills to accomplish a specific task, but with no regard to context, to when, where, and why. Literacy practices, according to Lytle and Wolfe, are application of literacy skills to accomplish tasks in real life contexts. So a person may use word recognition skills (as well as shape and color recognition) to "decode" the word STOP on a sign. She is using literacy skills to accomplish a task -- reading a sign. But the literacy practice also includes recognizing and acting on the meaning and importance of that sign. And that meaning varies from context to context, being one thing in busy traffic, another in an elementary school lunch line.

For this study we use the term "literacy practices" to mean uses of literacy: texts read or written or computation performed for purposes in contexts. We do not differentiate between events and practices, nor undertake the detailed analysis of context that would allow us to understand practices in the way Barton and Hamilton (1998) have in their ethnographic work. Rather, we have noted the ways the participants have talked about their uses of literacy in their lives and describe these as practices.

Variety of Literacy Practices Reported

All the participants in this study were enrolled in beginning level literacy classes based on results on standardized tests. But they all engaged in a variety of literacy practices. Some, before participating in an adult literacy program, had fairly limited practices, perhaps signing their name, reading simple signs, filling in simple numerical logs. For others, for example Harry, literacy practices included daily reading of two newspapers and compiling and filling in the information needed to complete regular reports of work completed on a factory

line. In this section we report on how people told us they used literacy: what they read and for what purpose; what they wrote and why; the uses of mathematical computation they mentioned. In the following section we report which of these were reported explicitly as changes resulting from participation in adult literacy programs.

For convenience, we report here on reading, writing, and computation as distinct activities. But in many instances these activities were combined in practices such as filling in a work log or paying a bill. And in every case people were reading, writing, doing math in a context for a reason.

Reading -- Purposes and Texts

People in this study read for many reasons in a variety of contexts. All used reading in their everyday home lives. Several read as part of their religious life. Several read for entertainment or general information. All had used reading as part of their educational project and several read to their children. Several used reading at work.

The everyday uses of reading often dealt with the "business" of their lives. Texts read included mail from the housing authority, court papers about custody of children, bills, bank statements.

Everyday reading also included the reading people did to accomplish a particular purpose: instructions for appliances, health information, maps, the telephone book, newspapers, advertisements.

> *First I try to see if I can get it to work myself. And then, if I can't, then I read the instructions.* (Ruth)

> *A little help I found, a diabetic book that has calories for all the meats and fruit and stuff that you'd be eating, and that help a lot.* (June)

> *I don't pay for it to come to the house, I just go sometimes and get the newspaper and sit and read it. Especially if I am looking for apartments.* (Laura)

The people who were active in church, read as part of their religious life. Harry, Laura, Elizabeth, Bert, and Will are all active in Protestant churches where a primary text, the Bible, and personal connection to and interpretation of its

meaning is an important part of the belief system. The Bible, as well as song books and religious educational materials, were texts they all talked about reading.

> *I mean, it takes me longer than, you know, normal people do, to read anything through, but just like the Bible, I read the Bible most of the time of the morning, before I go to work. And I read, you know, some in it, and it helps you out.* (Will)

Everyone reported reading for general information and for entertainment. All but Kris said they read newspapers. Newspapers were important as a source of local news. Elizabeth read what she called a "civil rights paper" that gave her news of the activities of Black churches in Memphis. Ruth uses the newspaper to keep up with local happenings. Harry, too, found out about local deaths, arrests, and marriages.

> *I read the newspaper because we get a newspaper over there, too. And I go across there and still get my paper.*
> *It be good you know to read, pick up something and try to read.*
> (Elizabeth)

> *Like most of the time I go out and eat breakfast, and I get me a paper And I'll sit there thirty minutes to a hour just reading a paper after I get through eating.*
> *I read the paper every day. We got the daily paper, _____. And when I go to a restaurant, I get the Tennessean* [Nashville daily newspaper].
> *You catch up on good news and bad news, generally on the front page. And then you look in there for the deaths, and they tell in our paper everybody that has been arrested and all that and what they did.* (Harry)

Fewer people (four) reported reading magazines. Bert reads *Sports Illustrated.* Laura reads "little dream books" and horoscope magazines.

> *I read magazines that I pick up in the grocery store, like films and stuff.* (Ruth)

> *I get the AARP [American Association of Retired Persons] book, I go through that. And Maturity book, they send out every month. Things like that that's kind of interesting. That AARP, that keeps you up kindly on the older people.* (Harry)

Harry said he never got into the habit of reading, meaning that he rarely read books. And for the most part this group did not talk about reading a book for entertainment. But three of the younger participants, Suzanne, Bert, and Kris, did. Bert checks out library books, "Romance, love story, and funny books, comics." Kris also reads romances. Suzanne reads "romance novels and mysteries and scary novels" when she "has the time."

People also talked about school books, books they had from their adult literacy classes. Seven of them talked about reading or studying in these books.

> *I read the books that I still have from adult classes.* (Ruth)

> *Adult Basic give me a math book. I study out of that. And writing skill, I study writing essay, what the adult class give me.* (Bert)

June reads for her correspondence course.

Reading to their children was a regular practice for June, Suzanne, and Marvin.

> *Every day. She comes in and has to read a book. I collect them books for her, kids' books, and she's got about three shelves nothing but books, and I have to read every one of them to her.* (June)

> *I have read to them [her oldest two daughters] but not as often as I do to [the youngest]. She knows every book, she knows what a sentence is, she can tell you what's coming up next. You know I read to her when I was pregnant, and then I read to her every night. She knows what book, she knows Three Little Pigs by heart.* (Suzanne)

> *I could be able to sit and read a little book with [a grandchild], you know. I could do that. Even though I didn't read it good, I could read it.* (Marvin)

Kris did not talk about reading to her children, but did talk about helping them with their schoolwork as did Suzanne. Suzanne also talked about her older daughters going to the library and reading a lot.

The reading practices that people talked about using at work included: reporting forms, finding locations as a truck driver, sending and receiving orders,

reading part names or numbers, reading labels, reading blueprints. Numerical understanding was a critical part of most of this reading and the tasks often involved writing as well.

> *We--, like the little price tags, we make sure the light numbers or the expiration dates hasn't went out or anything.* (Suzanne)

> *And they would always draw me out a little old map on a piece of paper or something, either show me on the map. I can read a map. So maybe into the city, but I know what highway was going where. But they would draw it out and put it on a piece of paper. And mostly, by me going to a place, I could almost look at the letters, and if they wrote the name of it down, I could look at the letters on the sign and tell whether I was at the right place.* (Marvin)

> *I can go through blueprints and make the materials, whatever they want, the bends and degree and setup and all that.* (Will)

June reads a little on her job, although the job in a nursing home kitchen is set up so reading is not necessary.

> *The only thing we look at that we have to read is like a patient's name, what is the type of diet. Like if it's regular, you know, regular food. And they got dots for that. But I don't use the dots. I read, I am better at reading them -- because it's simple words.* (June)

June has also reads at work in a sort of self-established workplace literacy project.

> *We got a little foreign boy that works down there. He can't speak English. I've been every now and then teaching him new words that I know. He brings the book in with the English words in it. It helps me, it helps him. I figured, "Why not try it?"* (June)

The texts that each participant in this study talked about reading are summarized in Table 12. Even though all had tested at a "literacy level" when they enrolled in ABE and several probably still would, each participant reported reading a variety of texts.

Table 12: Texts Read

	Harry	June	Laura	Elizabeth	Ruth	Suzanne	Be .	Kris	Will	Marvin
Reading										
Magazines	x		x		x		x			
Newspapers	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
Bible	x		x	x					x	
class material	x	x	x	x	x		x		x	
books for fun			x			x	x	x		
Patterns	x								x	
Dictionary		x								
children's books		x				x				x
Maps			x							x
Instructions					x					x
song books			x							
church literature			x	x						
Brochures		x	x							
cards, letters			x		x		x			
official mail			x	x				x		
court papers						x				
road signs										x
Bills	x	x				x		x		
Checks		x								
money orders				x						
children's schoolwork		x				x		x		
forms and applications						x			x	
job related materials	x	x	x			x	x	x	x	x
Computer activities								x		

Writing

Writing is an aspect of literacy that is more challenging than reading. While most people reading this report probably think of themselves as good readers, fewer would call themselves good writers. In this study, with the exception of Marvin, everyone reported reading before their enrollment in adult literacy classes. They reported much less writing. The primary contexts in which they reported writing were in their classes and in taking care of everyday business, at work, and to keep in communication with family and friends.

Writing was often associated with classwork, particularly with writing the GED essay. Harry, Ruth, Suzanne, and Bert all mentioned the essay.

> *The thing that I thought I couldn't never accomplish was writing an essay, and I did just fine. You now, and everything came to my mind, I was writing it down on paper, everything that I felt and everything, certain topics.* (Suzanne)

June and Elizabeth talked about writing as part of their class work. Elizabeth kept a journal in her class. June writes for her correspondence course.

> *Like a short story, you know, like about the president, somebody important, stuff like that.* (June)

Writing in everyday life included writing checks and money orders. Suzanne spoke of writing a sign to try to give away some puppies. Laura and Elizabeth write to communicate with family members. Harry makes notes on a wall calendar.

For most people, writing seemed to mean writing by hand. But Kris writes when she uses the computer and Internet.

> *I made cards, you know, made a whole bunch of stuff. Signs for my kids. And every now and then my dad would have me type up a bid that he was doing.* (Kris)

She also "talked" to people on an Internet chatline.

Laura and Ruth also used writing to communicate with people, Laura by sending cards to relatives and Ruth by writing letters two or three times a month

to her mother and brothers. Elizabeth talked about how she used to write her mother, but after her mother died in 1973, she had stopped writing at all until she started literacy classes.

Writing at work tended to be used to fill in reports and or for ordering. The jobs people had done did not require writing extensive text. But Harry, Suzanne, Kris, Will, and Marvin all talked about having to use some writing at work.

Will and Harry used writing as a memory aid.

> *I've got a little memo pad, book, you know, that like when I set up something I write down the stops that I've got my material goes in, and I put the stops and how far I need to go this, that, and all that. Well I write it down in this pad. And then when it comes up again, I write the serial number, the parts number we are running, I put it in this pad. And then they'll say "We need this." I can just go pick this up, look through and get my serial number and find out which die I need and the stops that I need, and you don't have to go through all of this going back, you know. A little time saver, I guess you'd call it.* (Will)

Harry has been called back to his last employer several times in order to train a new driver. He told us about using his book to help with training.

> *I had to write out reports every day. And you'd have to know how many, whatever parts you're on and all... I'd look at the parts after I memorized all the parts , and put down the part number and how many pieces run as they was running through.*
> *I've got every place I ever went, the name of the place and how to get there. And then when I would train somebody else, well then I've got all that information. I made it from A to Z. I went right down the alphabet and made the whole book.* (Harry)

Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) identified many types and uses of writing in their study of low-income families. While the ten people in our study did not use writing in all the ways Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines identified, they all wrote for several of these reasons. We found social-interactional writing, writing as a memory aid, financial writing, instrumental writing, expositional writing, and work-related writing. The texts each person mentioned writing are summarized in Table 13.

Table 13: Uses of writing

	Harry	June	Laura	Elizabeth	Ruth	Suzanne	Bert	Kris	Will	Marvin
Writing										
class exercises/essays	x	x			x	x	x			
cards, letters			x	x	x					
Memory aides	x								x	x
Signs						x				
Checks		x								
money orders				x						
forms and applications						x			x	
job reports	x					x	x	x	x	x
Computer activities								x		

Computation

Numeracy combines with literacy in both work and everyday life. And mathematics is part of the curriculum in most adult literacy and basic education programs. As Elizabeth told us, "[Math] comes in the package. You gotta learn to do all of it." In this section we report the ways people talked about using math in their lives.

Math in everyday life often involves money. People used math when they counted their change, wrote money orders or checks, paid bills.

> *When he [husband] gets paid he gives me his check and I'll do all the bills, every bill, and then what's left, we buy groceries and we split the rest.* (Suzanne)

June and Suzanne used math to count calories.

> *And a little help I found, a diabetic book that has calories for all the meats and fruit and stuff that you'd be eating, and that helps a lot.* (June)

There may have been other everyday uses of math, but when they talked about using mathematics, people tended to talk about their jobs.

Math at work was often used in combination with reading and writing as when filling out reports, logs, or orders as noted in the section on writing. Kris used math in her job at a pizza restaurant.

> *I mainly got involved in counting the money, making sure it was there, different things like that.* (Kris)

Measurement was another way people mentioned using math at work.

> *Basically, if you work, like in the sewing factory where I worked at, I had to learn measurement. You know I inspected panties. Well, I had to learn how to measure this way and that way.*
>
> *And then at H_____ Company we had to take our reels for different size water hoses. So we had to like at 3/4ths, we had to put a block in it. And then I had to cut off so many feet of the water hose, if you are rewinding a 100-foot waterhose, and then a 115, we had to know how much more we had to cut off. That was pretty interesting.* (Suzanne)

Will's use of measurement on the job is more complex.

> *It's all the stuff that we build, you know, it's by a print. It's got to be within specs and you've got so much tolerance, you know, and everything. And you don't go over it, it'll come back on you. Or under it....You've got your degree, so many degree, you know, you bend on -- which we've got the, you know, everything to do this -- and you've got your meters to tell the, like how many inch, and so much whatever they go by. You got to, you got these you go by and a tape, you use tape measures a lot. And you've got to get down to the hundredths of an inch and all that to get the stuff. That's where the tools all come in handy. So, it's-- Common sense will take you a long way, but you've got to have a little bit out there, too, to pull you through it, too.* (Will)

When we talked about mathematics, we heard about the uses we have just named. But we can assume that in people's lives there were many more uses of numeracy that are not necessarily thought of as math, for example spending money, measuring gas and oil, recording dates. It may be only when the numeracy needed to do a task is not known that people regard is as math. In regard to math, as to other literacy practices, we were interested in how the participants described their lives, so we did not use the detailed checklists that might have given us more information as to specific practices. Table 14 summarizes math uses mentioned by study participants.

Table 14: Uses of math

	Bert	Elizabeth	Harry	June	Kris	Laura	Marvin	Ruth	Suzanne	Will
measurement and counting on the job			x		x		x	x	x	x
count money, change		x		x	x	x			x	
count calories				x					x	
pay bills		x		x	x				x	
balance check book				x						
fill out money orders		x		x						
children's schoolwork		x			x	x			x	
job reports	x		x		x	x	x			x

Changes in Literacy Skills and Practices

As we have seen in the previous section the people in this study engaged in a variety of literacy practices in a variety of contexts for a variety of purposes. In this section we address changes in literacy practices, in particular how the participants assessed changes since their involvement in adult literacy classes. Table 15 summarizes the changes in literacy skills and literacy practices reported by the participants in this study.

Table 15: Changes in literacy skills and practices as reported by study participants (direct quotes are italicized)

Name	Skill change	Practice change
Bert	- *read quicker* - *learned a lot of new words*	- more reading - going to library
Elizabeth	- breaking words into syllables - compound words - understanding words better - *how to do math better and better*	- *counting my pennies better* - reading Bible better - reading (official) mail - making out money order - reading Sunday school book - reading newspaper occasionally
June	- *read a little bit faster* - sounding out to spell - using dictionary	- paying attention to news on TV - reading more to youngest child - opening and using checking account - using dictionary - reading newspaper
Kris	no differences reported	*It didn't make no difference*
Laura	- reading map - *read even better* - using sounds in spelling	- using map to find new apartment - reading Bible better - reading "little" books
Harry	- algebra and geometry (temporary) - format for essays	
Marvin	- *learned how to read some* - *times table*	- reading to grandchild - using instructions to program wireless remote - reading mail, newspaper
Ruth	- standard written format: paragraphs and margins - fractions	- reading instructions - writing letters using standard format - *relating better* to newspaper
Suzanne	- measurement - how to write an essay	- using measurement at work - reading more to youngest child
Will	- spelling - math	- filling out job reports - reading books - reading Bible more - reading newspaper regularly

We begin by looking at changes in skills. We are not talking here about changes in tested skill levels but rather in actual skill changes people reported having achieved from their participation in literacy classes. The reading skills people named included: learning new words, reading more quickly, breaking words into parts, and understanding words better. Bert, Elizabeth, June, Laura, and Marvin all reported some changes in reading skills when asked about what they had learned and could do differently since enrollment. Harry, Ruth, and Suzanne talked about learning the format for writing essays, while Bert said it was the hardest thing for him. Laura and June reported learning spelling skills -- to "sound out" words.

Elizabeth, Harry, Ruth, Marvin and Will mentioned learning new math skills. But Harry said he had probably forgotten the algebra and geometry he learned for the GED test. Suzanne also passed the math section of the test, but said she never did "accomplish" math. The math skill she did talk about learning was measurement, and this was learned on the job as well as in class. Bert and Kris talked about studying math, but not about specific skills they had learned.

Changes in literacy practices attributed to their participation in adult basic education were reported by all the participants except Harry and Kris. When we asked Harry if he ever used any of the things he studied for the GED test he answered, "Well probably I have and not really realized it." But he did not name any particular things. He had enrolled to see if he could pass the GED test, and when he did it was that accomplishment that mattered. He already engaged in a wide variety of literacy practices and did not seem to feel the need for expanding them. Kris, too was focused on passing the GED in order to access job training. Her serious health problems and possibly other factors meant that her time in class had been limited. She told us, "It didn't make no difference." Harry and Kris may be assumed to be among the participants with the most extensive initial literacy skills if we judge by Kris's Internet use and the speed with which Harry passed the GED test.

The other eight participants reported changes in literacy practices, most in several contexts. We have categorized these by context rather than type (reading, writing, math) of practice. We found changes in practices in everyday life, in practices that involve understanding of expository text, and in the importance of reading in people's lives. There were also a few changes reported in literacy practices at work.

Changes in carrying out the everyday "business" of life and in the literacy practices they used in interacting with institutions and bureaucracies were reported by Elizabeth and June.

> *I got it [checking account] in May. Opened that in May with that cashier check the kid's daddy gave me. Doing good on that. I ain't bounced no checks. Make my deposits that I need to make to cover what bills I have to pay, and always make sure that monthly charges took off, and make sure I got money in there to cover them checks that I do write. And I am pretty good on that now.* (June)

> *Fix my own money order out. I fill all my own money order and everything.* (Elizabeth)

> *I can read all of this right here [letter from housing authority]. But I couldn't, I couldn't before I started going back to school now.* (Elizabeth)

For both these women, the ability to control their own finances seemed to mean new independence.

Marvin and Ruth both talked about using written instructions in ways they had not before. Laura now uses the newspaper to search for apartments and a map to locate what she has found.

> *But now, I get the instructions, and I look at them. I can read a little bit. Now I can sit there, "Hey, that goes in so-and-so." And do it, you know. Because a lot of times now, this wireless remote as you call it now, you sat there and date it, set it up to where you catch a picture next week sometime. I can do all that now. But used to I couldn't.* (Marvin)

> *And also the adult classes taught me how to read a map. I learned how to find myself around here in town with the little yellow map book when I had to go out and look for apartments.* (Laura)

Ruth has written to her family for many years. But the way she approaches these letters has changed.

> *I think I write more [letters to family] now. And I think that I write better. Before I just wrote everything straight. I did not even know what a paragraph was. And sometimes I used words that shouldn't even be there*

in that paragraph. Now that I know about it, I may use different words. (Ruth)

Religious reading is not a new practice for Laura, Will, or Elizabeth, but for each of them reading is now easier and possibly more important.

I learned to read my Bible even better and to form my more closer relationship with the Lord. (Laura)

I read it some [before] but not like I did, you know... I read it with people, you know, a lot more then. And you can, when you can read more, you can understand more, you know what I mean. You pick up on things more, and it's... (Will)

We heard changes in how people use literacy to understand the wider world. Will, Marvin, June and Elizabeth talked about reading newspapers regularly now. For Marvin, at least, this was an added way to access information, one with social implications.

I'm not ... don't get me wrong now, I am not real good at reading still, but I've learned a lot about reading, it makes me want to read now, and try to read better. Because there's a lot of interesting things that you misses when you can't read. Like newspapers, you can't sit down and read it, you miss everything. You try to sit down with other peoples and get in on the conversation, and you don't know what they're talking about, you didn't read the newspaper. And so, that kind of bothers you when you are in that situation, not being able to read. Because I've got a lot of friends right now that we sit down and we talk, and, hey, I done looked in the paper and see the same thing that he sees, so we can discuss this matter. You know, hey, so-and-so, and so, and so, yes, I see that, too. (Marvin)

And newspaper, I pick up the newspaper, that's a every night thing, you know. I go to the mailbox or the paper box, and get the newspaper and go through it. (Will)

June and Ruth talked about new understanding of and interest in the news.

You see, the news talks about what's going on overseas and stuff. You read the book, and I can understand what's going on over there now. Before, I didn't know. I thought, well, that's just news, something to report, that's it.

Then after I read the book and learned how this become, I understood more. I was, "OK, now this is how this ended up at." I'd be walking in there to get something, and something about overseas happen [on television]. I'd stop and come back in here. "Wait a minute now, I've got to catch this." Grow interested now. I understand more now. (June)

I can relate better to what they write in the newspapers. I understand it more. (Ruth)

Marvin shares things he has learned with his foster child.

My little grandbaby now, I've learned so many things that I try to teach him a lot of things that I could not teach him when he first came to us. (Marvin)

This is perhaps not a change in practice so much as a change in content of the practice of teaching his children. Similarly, Suzanne and June both talked about reading more to their younger children than to their older daughters, a change in intensity.

We heard only a little about changed practices at work. Bert referred to possible differences in how he was able to work when he was employed in warehouses. Suzanne made new uses of measurement, but much of that she learned on the job. Will however was clear that he was better able to do the documentation and reporting required on his job.

But while I went down there, [to class] it really made a difference, you know, like on where I work now, I fill out, you've got to fill out your tickets on what you run, you got to keep the account on it, you've got to go through all this and fill it out, date it and what it is and all that. And it's helped me on all of that.
I don't have to count on my fingers and toes as much as I did. (Will)

Becoming a reader, someone who reads not only when he or she needs information that is most easily obtained by reading, but someone who thinks of reading as something to do in itself is one of this study's most strongly noted changes in literacy practice. Some of the participants in this study were readers when they came to adult education. Harry says he has read a daily newspaper for many years. Suzanne, Kris, and Bert also reported reading for pleasure, and it is not clear that for them this was a change after participation in adult education.

However, Bert now goes to the library for books. And many others told us about their new habit of reading.

> *It's just something that do something for you, just make things seem like they're just really picking up. Life's brighter, when you learn how to read, just a little bit. Like I say, now, I am not saying I am no scholar. I can't read real good. It's some things that I can't read right now. But I have learned how to read some. That's better than what I did before I started.* (Marvin)

> *Well things that I read now that I didn't before I started taking classes -- I read the papers. Just about every morning, I gets me a newspaper. A lot of literature that I get, I read. Lot of things that I get I enjoy -- everything, but I get a lot of things in books. Just about anything that I get my hands on sometime.* (Marvin)

> *Oh it's good [her reading]. It's a whole lot better. It's getting better and better, cause I ain't stopped reading. I been just practicing, you know what I'm saying?* (Elizabeth)

> *Lots of times, well I get like Sunday's paper, and I'll read on it. But the problem is on it, I'll only read it backwards. I'll only go from the back page to the front. It's more interesting in the back than it is on the front, anyway. That's the way I want to read it.* (June)

> *My pastor, he told me to start trying to read other things, too. I mean, it's good to read the Bible he said, but just try to read other things. And so, I keep books around. These are my son's books from college, but I may get little dream books like this because I like little stuff like that, and I'll read that. Horoscopes and what have you, I get to that and read.* (Laura)

> *And there's like reading, I was always slow reading. Which still, you know, really, I'm not no speed reader or nothing, but I got to reading books, you know, down there that they had. And now I'll still catch myself doing the same thing like I got in when in school. I pick up a book something like, and I'll start reading through it. I mean, it takes me longer than, you know, normal people do, to read anything through.* (Will)

Will's use of the word "normal" cautions us not to normalize being a reader. People who read easily, and people who "take longer" all have their own

purposes for reading as for other literacy practices. In pointing out the increased reading practices of some of the participants in this study and their increased interest in reading, we recognize our understanding of reading as a rich and valuable experience. But we also see the need to recognize that this interest may not be shared by many people, both those who can read easily and those who can't.

Summary

To summarize our findings on literacy practices:

- People read a wide variety of texts for a variety of personal purposes.
- People had a much narrower range of uses of reading at work than in their everyday life.
- While used less often than reading, people engaged in a variety of writing.
- Much of the literacy practice at work involved a combination of reading, writing, and computation.
- Math seemed to be used most commonly used in everyday life in practices involving money.
- All but one of the participants reported acquiring new literacy skills from their participation in adult literacy programs.
- All but two reported changes in the ways they use literacy.
- Most of the reported changes were in people's personal as opposed to work life.
- The changes included a variety of new practices in everyday life for five people.
- Increased access to and understanding of expository text (the Bible and news) was reported by six people.
- Five people talked about the more extensive reading they now do, including reading for pleasure.

While most of the people in this study used literacy in a variety of ways before they enrolled in literacy classes, they identified new uses of literacy in their lives that they attributed to participation in adult education programs. They were better able to accomplish some of the tasks of everyday living, and they had increased access to knowledge and ideas in print.

Section 8: Sense Of Self -- How People Think About Themselves

In the previous section we examined the changes in literacy practices that study participants identified as outcomes of their participation in ABE. In this section we examine internal changes or outcomes. Most evaluations of the impact of adult literacy programs say that students report increased self-esteem (Beder, 1999). Many of the participants in our study talked about changes in their sense of themselves when they reflected on the differences their participation in adult literacy programs had made in their lives. These changes might be lumped into "increased self-esteem," but we have found a variety of changes and discuss them separately.

But before we look at changes, we will discuss our findings in regard to two aspects of the participants over-all sense of self: perceived self-efficacy and resilience. According to Quigley (1997), adult literacy students are often described as having low self-esteem. While this concept is not tightly defined, it generally refers to a lack of confidence in approaching learning or life in general. As discussed in the section on adult education, we did hear about some fear and shame that people felt when they first enrolled. But with two exceptions[1], we did not find people with low self-esteem. To the contrary, they had a sense of themselves as able, competent people who had accomplished a great deal in their lives. This was the case even though many of them had dealt with difficult and even traumatic events and times in their lives. We are not clinical psychologists and our interviews were not clinical. Our findings here are based on how people talked about themselves and their lives and should be taken as that. We heard people who by-and-large believed in their own abilities, were resilient, and in the cases of most of the older participants, were satisfied with their lives.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is commonly defined as people's belief in their ability to achieve and to have control over their actions. Psychologist Albert Bandura considers self-efficacy an important factor affecting people's performance in various spheres of life:

[1] The exceptions were Laura and Kris. Laura had multiple physical problems and spoke often about her depression. Kris suffers from a chronic digestive disease which severely impairs her energy and strength.

> Among the mechanisms of personal agency, none is more central or persuasive that people's beliefs in their capabilities to exercise control over their level of functioning and environmental demands. (Bandura et al., 1996, p. 1206)

Mager (1992) identifies five main effects of self-efficacy on people's behavior: choice behavior, motivation, perseverance, facilitative thought patterns, and decreased vulnerability to stress and depression. Several of our participants talked about such behaviors as contributing to their survival despite multiple obstacles and to their doing well in life in general.

Choice Behavior

When faced with a choice, people often choose the option toward which they feel most efficacious (Mager, 1992, p. 32). Most of our ten participants felt confident about their abilities to perform well in certain areas, and that influenced their careers, although lack of an official credential and, in some cases, of sufficient basic skills, made pursuing these careers more difficult. Marvin was certain of his ability to memorize, to learn new things quickly by the way of "hands-on;" he never doubted his ability to work as a shop supervisor and felt bitter about not having acquired the reading and writing skills needed for that position.

> *I guess I could've went far in this world if it hadn't been for not having education. If I had of had a good education, no telling what I could have been.* (Marvin)

Bert wanted to study computers in college because working with them seems easy to him.

> *Well, because it's easy, like to move my fingers, type, and it is just like looking at TV. Sitting down, looking at TV, typing, programming, math, words...* (Bert)

Kris knew that she was well able to cope with the responsibility of assistant manager's position.

> *You got to make sure that other people come in. And if they don't, you got to make sure have backup. It's more or less like a manager job, but you don't have the authority to hire or fire, that's the only difference.* (Kris)

Harry knew he was a good worker and was proud of his record, of being offered a foreman's position, of being called to work several times after retirement. Suzanne tries to find factory work because she likes it, is a fast worker, and is good with her hands.

> *I like factory work, factory work. I am good with my hands, see.* (Suzanne)

June would like to work, like her mother, in hotel management, because she feels that that is what she can do best.

> *But I would rather go into, like, management, hotel management and stuff, I can do that... [My mother], she's taught me how to do that, and, basically, I know how to do it, you know, blindfolded. To me, it's simple, the way she does. You know, she took her time, she showed me how to do things.* (June)

Motivation

High self-efficacy often makes people feel motivated, or eager to mobilize more effort. All of the participants were motivated enough to enroll in literacy programs at adult age, in almost all instances without external pressure.

> *I go on my own free will you know, go to try to learn something for myself.* (Elizabeth)

> *And I was determined that I needed this [GED] and I needed to get a job, and you have to have it to get a job nowadays, so I figured, well, I'm going to do it again. ... I was determined because I knew if I could lose - I lost 150 pounds. So I knew, if I could do that and put my mind, I knew that I could do this.* (Suzanne)

The three who may have been referred to literacy programs by welfare agencies were June, Laura, and possibly Kris, and both June and Laura re-enrolled eventually on their own. Besides formal learning, we found multiple examples of informal learning efforts and other actions that people were motivated to undertake: personal budgeting; church activities; Internet; hobbies; and learning new skills at work.

And if you do not know how to operate [machinery], you'll never get it cranked, you won't ever get it to move out of its tracks... And I learned all of this. And I did not know how to read. But I learned thins because I was interested in what I was doing, I loved it. (Marvin)

But see just, like, if I go, keep on going to school I would learn how to read better and better. I know how to do math better and better... I do things I really need to do. But I'm just going on because I mean, I can read better. I can learn to read..., I'll probably learn to read better and better. (Elizabeth)

I don't want to be here long. But I will do it as long as it'll take, you know. (Kris)

The excitement of it all. I am a 52 year old man, and I still get excited at things that I haven't heard, at something new every day. (Marvin)

Facilitative Thought Patterns

Mager (1992) describes these patterns as "success scenarios" where a person, confronted with a learning challenge, says to him/herself, "I am going to figure out how to solve this problem," rather than simply, "I cannot do this." Although we heard "failure statements" from several participants - often from Laura, occasionally from Kris, June, and others, more often we heard statements of determination, of confidence in one's ability to perform as needed and to solve problems.

I'm good at math, that's about the only thing I'm good at, is math. I can't think in my head, but if I have it on paper, I can do it real quick. ... And I got the algebra, and of course it took me a while, but I figured that out, too. (June)

So, when I put my mind to something, I pretty well want to know how to do it. A lot of other people would just say, "No, I don't want to do that," and give up. I'm not like that. But I want to do it right, too. (Suzanne)

Perseverance and Less Vulnerability to Stress And Depression

Convincing evidence of the participants' perseverance, or persistence, is the length of their stay in literacy programs (all of them had at least 80 hours of

instruction, and some had significantly more). Five out of ten (Harry, Ruth, Elizabeth, Will, and Marvin) worked for the same employers for more then ten years. Both perseverance and vulnerability to stress and depression are closely related to the concept of resilience which is discussed in the next section.

Resilience

According to Vaillant (1994), "resilience is a product of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and a stable sense of self" (p. 302) and it "conveys both the capacity to be bent without breaking and the capacity, once bent, to spring back" (p. 284). Vaillant identifies the following sources of resilience in a person's life: absence of risk factors and presence of protective factors; timing and/or context of events; luck; social supports; cognitive strategies (attributional style and temperament); self-esteem and self-efficacy; and ego mechanisms of defense. Even though they had many risk factors in their lives, study participants seem to have been able to draw on other sources to develop resilience.

Risk Factors

All the ten participants had multiple risk factors, factors "thought by general consensus to put children at risk for poor psychosocial outcomes" (Vaillant, 1994, p. 285) present in their lives. Poverty, racial and class inequality, and inadequate early schooling are the most obvious ones. Several participants also spoke of childhood trauma or abuse. Ruth's sister was accidentally shot by another sibling when they were children. Marvin lost his father when he was ten, and had to

> *...get out in the snow and ice and try to make a living for me and my mom. Like I say, I had days when I should have been home in by the fire, [but] was out trying to make a living when other children was at home being warm. (* Marvin)

Elizabeth also remembered working hard as a child:

> *We usually couldn't go to school when it was pretty. Only time we could go to school was when it was cold. And there wasn't nothing to do. We usually had to pull cotton that's why we couldn't go to school. And then we had so far to walk to school when we get to school we'd be so cold you couldn't learn nothing. ... That was a long way to walk. When it's cold. And didn't have [warm] clothes on. One time I got to school I was so cold,*

> *you know, you put your hands to the fire and your hands started thawing up. Whew! That'd make you cry like a baby. ... I know we pulled cotton in the frost one time. I been so cold that day that my shoes come off, I didn't know they were off. My foots were so cold.* (Elizabeth)

Younger participants did not have to work so hard as children, but they had their own troubles. Both June's and Laura's school years were affected by their learning disabilities and, subsequently, fear of schooling.

> *It's just seemed like people would have short patience with me, because it was, I guess, taking me a very long time to do anything, and they just got impatient to the place where I didn't want to bother anybody.* (Laura)

> *I used to pass out on the first day of school. Every year, I'd pass out.* (June)

This fear of teachers and, in generally, of people judging her, continued into June's adult life, making her reluctant to go out.

> *I can go to [my daughter's] school and it just makes me nervous. I don't know if it's because, I guess, because I think the teachers are smarter than me, and they know more, and here I am being taught something, you know, I should already know, and I just feel uncomfortable with it. And, three to four [people] to the room, I can deal with it. More than that, no.* (June)

Like most other participants, June grew up in poverty, in a family with an alcoholic father and mother who was working several jobs and did not have much time left for her children.

Suzanne, who grew up in a similar environment, also experienced being "mistreated" by her parents.

> *My home life, before I got married, was not good at all. My mother, she was working 3-4 jobs, and my father, he just, he stayed on prescription medication, he was addicted to it, and didn't have a job... But I quit at the tenth grade, and I was failing anyway, I couldn't keep my mind on what was going on at home, and my father mistreating me, and, I thought, well, I'm no good. He's talked about me. My sister, she was getting all those praises and things, and then I'm, well..* (Suzanne)

Protective Factors

Although the participants had significant risk factors in their lives, they were able to develop resilience. Many spoke of having protective factors (positive experiences) in their lives: loving parents; good health; sustaining and often interesting employment. Many of them also had strong social supports, and the ability to "internalize" others. (Vaillant, 1994, p. 333)

> *And that's why I was saying, some people, I was better off than some of the people that was, you know, telling their stories. My heart went out to them, too. It's like, I should meet with them and I should talk with them. And I don't know, this is just me, whenever I see someone seem to be sad and down, or having a hard time, I want to kind of encourage them.* (Laura)

Eight out of ten participants lived with family members. All talked about being close to and to some degree sharing their life with their parents, siblings, and children; several described their marital relationships as those of mutual support and trust.

> *And we come from a nice family. My mother she was nice, she did the best she could do, you know.* (Elizabeth)

> *All my family is close, you know. If I have a toothache, everybody in my family knows about it - that's how close we are.* (Kris)

> *My mom lets me use her car. That's nice of her, is it? She helps me out. She gives me a little boost. You know, there are days, like that day I had to come home from work, I was so sick, I couldn't work. And she said, "You don't look so good. You go home and I'll take care of the kids while you are resting." That helped out.* (June)

> *I loved what I was doing, I loved my job. My boss man was good to me, first man I ever worked for was real good to me. And I got up in the morning, every morning I got up, I wanted to go to work.* (Marvin)

Luck and Timing/Context of Events

Factors of luck (chance fortunate experiences) and timing certainly play an important role in development of resilience. Says Vaillant: "Being fired at 22 may be taken in stride; at 55 in can be a crushing blow" (1994, p. 299). However, these issues are so complex that we will not venture into discussing them in this paper. We will only note that several people referred to their "luck" (Harry and Ruth, for example, attributed to it their recovery from illnesses). Timing and context of life events are more evident in the profiles of the participants that are attached in Appendix Three.

Attributional Style

Attributional style is essentially the optimistic or pessimistic attitude that we take toward the good and the bad than happens to us. Most of the participants talk about their positive outlook, about "normalizing" rather than "awfulizing" . (Ellis, 1971) their life events. As well as a positive attitude, having an even, cheerful temperament can be a powerful source of resilience.

> *You got to have a good outlook whether it turns out good or not. And that's what I tried to have, a positive attitude all the time. And it keeps you going.* (Harry)

> *... But we always did have, you know, somewhere to stay, food to eat. And we always did have that. And I wasn't even working [at the time]. So. It was a good life. But now it's better because I ain't got to work.* (Elizabeth)

> *As they say, if you wait long enough, things gets better or worse, one. And everything improved for me, I guess.* (Harry)

> *I done pretty well. I hope I did. It seems like I did.* Marvin)

> *So I try to keep from going downhill all the way with health, strength, mind, soul. I just try to stay active with the church, and no matter what bothers me, I just block it out and try to stay cheerful, happy, and try to make somebody else's day.* (Laura)

Mature Ego Defenses

Vaillant (1994) identifies five mature ego defenses ("involuntary, unconscious strategies... by which our minds can cope with stress and danger" (p. 10): altruism; sublimation; suppression; anticipation; and humor. Mature defenses are very different from psychotic, immature, or neurotic defenses. In almost all interviews we found evidence of mature defenses (with the exception of sublimation, the concept that we did not consider ourselves trained enough in psychology to analyze) that contribute to resilience.

Altruism. Helping others and treating them as one would like to be treated, gives a reward of self-satisfaction, of appreciation of what one is doing. Lives of our participants contained many examples of altruism: Will, as a young man, took care of his grandmother until she died; Harry, in his middle age, did the same for his mother. Laura volunteered in her church daycare, and saw her role in church as that of an "encourager." Elizabeth, after having raised six children, was helping with raising grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Several people talked about the enjoyment of helping others.

> *I like what I'm doing, it gives me something to look forward to every day. And maybe try to help someone, that's the main important thing in our life. To be able to make something happen for someone else that would help them along the line, and it does a lot for me, too.* (Marvin)

> *And that made me feel good that I was at least doing something useful to help others.* (Laura)

Anticipation, or "realistic and affect-laden planning for future discomfort," (Vaillant, 1994, p. 71) prevented several people from operating "on a crisis basic," and let them take better control over circumstances of their lives.

> *And I just, I don't know, I got pretty disgusted with myself one day, ... and I went to bed, and I said, "Well, tomorrow is going to be a better day." But it can't be better unless you make it better. So I just woke up and just started changing everything.* (June)

> *I believe now that I have more determination in me now than I ever had, so I believe that I could stand up and do anything I wanted out there.* (Suzanne)

Suppression, or "wise stoicism," (Vaillant, 1994, p. 70) allows a person to make a decision to postpone an immediate impulse, to be able to keep a distant goal in mind while waiting for its achievement. This was evident in the fact that most of the participants stayed for a relatively long time in literacy programs and in long-term employment in hard jobs,. This capacity was also present in other, everyday activities.

> *You know, I am glad Mama and him did do us that way because me, myself, all my sisters and brothers learned, if we want something we don't get money to get it, we know, we make do with what we got.* (June)

Humor. Although it is difficult to illustrate in quotes out of context, we heard many instances of humor: jokes, funny stories about oneself and/or others; sometimes, smiling at difficult aspects of one's reality. Ruth, for example, was telling us how cold is the chicken factory where she works: *Seems like they keep it too cold and try to freeze us. The birds are already dead.*

> Valuing humor is another example of taking a positive approach to life. *And then we, I got a lot of old guys crack jokes and everybody get to laughing and when you laugh, it really do something for you when you get a good laugh in.* (Marvin)

Overall, we found that our ten participants had strong belief in their ability to perform. We did not hear many statements of feeling inadequate or worthless. We have also heard stories of struggle for survival, of enduring stress, and working hard at overcoming difficulties. These findings suggest that these people's self-efficacy and resilience could have contributed to their decisions to participate for a relatively long time in adult basic education programs.

Life Satisfaction

The participants in this study had two broad purposes for enrolling in adult literacy classes. One group seemed to use ABE as a way to solve problems in their lives. Laura, June, Suzanne, Kris, Ruth, and Bert all hoped that increased skills and credentials would give them access to better jobs and more financial security and independence. The second group, Harry, Elizabeth, Marvin, and Will approached adult education as a matter of pride, of wanting to accomplish something -- a GED or better skills -- for themselves. They were not trying to solve a problem, but to complete an unfinished task (although Will was also

thinking about trying to pass the GED that would enable him to find a better job). It is from this group that we heard a sense of overall satisfaction with their lives.

> *But we always did have you know somewhere to stay, you know what I'm saying, food to eat. And we always did have that. And I wasn't even working [when her children were young]. So it was a good life. But now it's better, because I ain't got to work. I just make my check do, what I get. And people holler, "You can't live without a lot of money, all that stuff." You can live off just what God blessed you with, you'll be able to make it. So I just make it with the help of the Lord.* (Elizabeth)

> *I had a hard life all my life practically until-- as they say, if you wait long enough things gets better or worse, one. And everything improved for me, I guess. And so, I'm thankful for what I've got.*
> *Long as a man keeps warm in the wintertime, and cool in the summertime, and got plenty to eat, well I reckon you're doing all right.* (Harry)

Changes in Self

When we asked people to reflect on the differences their participation in adult basic education had made, they talked about changes in their sense of themselves as much as about using new skills or knowledge. People talked about pride and satisfaction in their accomplishments that made them "feel better" about themselves. They talked about getting over shame. People also talked about new ease in social situations and about being able to "speak out" more.

As was discussed in the section on internal barriers to participation in adult education, some of the older participants reported feeling ashamed to be enrolling in adult literacy class. Their ensuing recognition that they were not the only adults their age with difficulties reading and the supportive environment of the classes led to an easing of their embarrassment. Fingeret and Drennon (1997) found "intensive interaction inside the literacy program provides opportunities for the development of relationships that mediate the sense of shame and isolation and help adults integrate literacy into their identities"(p. 83). Three people in our study spoke clearly about their shame and how that changed with the recognition that they were not alone.

> *And I was shamed, that's another thing. I couldn't see myself going to class, grown man, fifty years old almost, sitting up in class. And just was*

embarrassing to me. But after I started and I seen more than just me sitting there, some people were sixty and seventy years old, I said, "Why should I be ashamed? There's some people older than I am." And, hey, I got more into it. (Marvin)

As people gained skills or a credential, they were proud of their successes. We heard this pride in accomplishment particularly from Harry and Suzanne who passed the GED test, and from Elizabeth and Marvin who both had very limited reading abilities when they first enrolled in adult education. Harry, Marvin, and Elizabeth had all successfully raised their families and been employed many years. Still, their accomplishments in adult literacy classes were new and important to them. Suzanne, too, felt a real sense of accomplishment. And it is interesting to note the importance of the physical artifacts -- certificates, a cap and gown -- as markers of accomplishment.

But the biggest thing, I think, it build my ego, and I've had a lot of praises and even made a write-up with me in the paper. Had my picture in the paper on the front page. But it was just something I wanted. But I'm glad I got it, and I've still got my cap and gown and got my tassel thing with 95 on it in the car. (Harry)

It made a whole lot of difference how I feel about myself because I feel better about myself since I learned how to read better. I feel like I'm somebody. You feel better about yourself when you learn how to do a lot of things for yourself you know. (Elizabeth)

Four times and I finally, finally done it. And it was all kinds of certificates. I got them all on my wall, you know, and I keep looking at them and think, "Well, I did that." (Suzanne)

Marvin's wife shared in his successes.

I had a few graduations myself. I got some plaques in yonder, I got at school, and she was just about at every one of them. So, I enjoyed her being there and seemed like it did her a lot of good just for me to go and participate in the school, so hey. I loved it. (Marvin)

Marvin also found more ease in social situations when he was able to read the newspaper. He had relied on television for news, but now is able to refer to newspaper articles he has read when in conversations with his friends. He also

talked about how the adult education program had given him opportunities to help other people when he recruited or spoke to young people about staying in school.

Social changes for Suzanne and Bert were not from changed literacy practices, but from the opportunity to be with different people, in a "more happier environment," as Suzanne described it. Bert talked about how he was able to communicate more with adults and that adults were easier to get along with than the people he went to high school with. He made friends in his ABE classes that he sees outside class. Laura also made friends with whom she keeps in contact.

Voice was another aspect of self that changed for some people. Harry and Marvin both made speeches in support of adult literacy programs. The programs provided the opportunities for them to express themselves publicly. Marvin talked about making speeches with some pride, but without referring to any difficulty. For Harry this was a challenge:

> *But when [my teacher] asked me to make that speech, I got all nervous, and I guess I embarrassed her, but she made like I done all right.* (Harry)

Ruth was the participant who spoke about a significant change in voice that she attributed to her participation in adult basic education classes. She told us that when she had started classes that she was shy and "afraid to speak my opinion," and that this had changed.

> *And also about speaking up, I can do this better now. Like recently, at my work, I was scheduled to have a vacation for Christmas. And then my supervisor comes to me and says that this other woman will get the Christmas week off, not me. And I was already scheduled, and she even had less seniority. So I spoke up. I said, "No, it isn't right. I want my vacation." And I got it. And before I was so shy.* (Ruth)

This increase of voice makes a difference not only in how Ruth feels about herself, but in how she is able to act in her life. The changes we found in sense of self are summarized in Table 16.

Table 16: Changes in Sense of Self (participants' direct quotes are italicized)

Name	Self-Esteem, Pride	Overcoming shame	Voice	Social
Bert				Comfort at going to school with adults
Elizabeth	*I feel better about myself* *I feel like I'm somebody*	*I found there was people can't read as good as I could. I ain't worried about nothing now.*		
June	In taking high school courses by mail Using checking account			Associate more with other people *I get out more*
Kris				
Laura				Interest in Phyllis Wheatley Spiritual growth
Harry	*It built my ego.* Picture in paper, cap and gown *I'm proud I went back and got it.*		Opportunity to speak publicly	
Marvin	*I got a few plaques in yonder.*	*Why should I be ashamed? There's some people older than I am.*	Opportunity to speak publicly	Opportunity to *"try to help someone"* Ease with friends since he's read the newspaper, too.
Ruth			*I'm more outspoken than I was before.*	
Suzanne	*I wanted to do it to feel better about myself than I did, and I do feel better.* *I've got all kinds of certificates. I was so proud of myself.*			*I believe now that I have more determination in me now than I ever had.*
Will		*I mean everybody was in the same boat when you got there.*		

Summary

To summarize our findings about self, the ways the participants feel about themselves and the changes they have made:

- For the most part the participants in this study had a strong sense of self-efficacy; they believed in their ability to get things done
- They exhibited resilience in the face of difficult life situations
- They often exhibited mature defense mechanisms
- Three participants talked about losing their sense of shame at being in a literacy class
- Four of the participants (the two who passed the GED test and the two who we believe had the most limited reading skills at enrollment) expressed a strong sense of accomplishment.
- Four participants talked about changes in their social situations as a result of participation in adult education.
- A new and stronger voice or opportunities to express themselves were reported by three participants.

These adults as a group were resilient people with a sense of self-efficacy. However, they perceived changes in self to be an important outcome of their participation in adult literacy education.

Section 9. What Difference Did Participation Make?

This study addresses the question of how learners in adult literacy programs define the impact of participation in these programs on their lives. In eighteen expanded interviews with ten current and former adult literacy students from Tennessee, we heard people describe their lives, their participation in adult literacy programs, and the changes in their lives that they attributed to their participation. In this section we look more closely at these changes. We also look at two areas where we might have expected to find more impact and to offer some ideas about why we did not. We examine the extent to which people's goals for participation in adult literacy programs were met. And finally we consider some implications of this study for practitioners and policy makers.

Changes Found

People told us about changes that they attributed to adult literacy program participation in two areas, in their literacy skills and practices and in how they felt about themselves. Changes in literacy practices included:

- a variety of new practices in everyday life,
- increased access to and understanding of expository text,
- and more extensive reading.

Changes in sense of self included:

- a sense of accomplishment and strengthened self-esteem,
- changes in social situations,
- and new opportunities or abilities to give voice to their convictions.

We have not drawn conclusions about what factors in the adult literacy programs led to these outcomes, but we can assume that these included various combinations of new skills learned, challenges faced (from enrolling to completing the GED), new social experiences, and the way learnings from all these were implemented in people's lives.

The findings of changed literacy practices and more positive sense of self are consistent with those of earlier studies. From the twenty-three studies reviewed by Beder (1999), the following potential outcomes of participation in ABE programs emerged as most conclusive: gains in employment and in earnings; positive influence on continuing education; self-reported gains in basic

skills; positive impact on learners' self-image and on involvement in their children's education. Our findings are in agreement with Beder's as to changes in participants' sense of self, perceived improvement in basic skills, and to some degree, in increased involvement with children's education (our participants reported having been highly involved with their children's education prior to enrollment in literacy programs).

Our findings also agree with those of Fingeret and Danin (1991) who identified improvement in literacy skills and changes in literacy practices, as well as acquiring more positive attitudes and beliefs as impacts of participation in the Literacy Volunteers in New York city

Fingeret and her colleagues (1994) also found increased self-concept and self-confidence, as well as growth of cultural awareness, women's empowerment, and more involvement with children's work to be among the outcomes of the two literacy programs in British Columbia. Among the literacy practice outcomes, they describe more use of writing, improved job performance and being qualified for better jobs, and new activities that participants were not able to do before. The participants in our study also reported new activities, increased use of writing – both at home and on the job, and, in families with small children, more reading to the youngest. In two cases, participants talked about increased awareness of their own and other cultures. Women did talk about increased independence and voice and linked such changes with program participation. Several participants spoke of reduced shame and a sense of accomplishment and pride.

Changes Sought

The participants in this study defined the impacts of participation in adult literacy programs in terms of new literacy practices, i.e. new things they were able to do, and in new understandings of themselves and their abilities. Their understandings of the impact of participation in adult education go beyond the changes defined by the purposes of the new Workforce Investment Act:

> (1) assist adults to become literate and obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency;
> (2) assist adults who are parents to obtain the educational skills necessary to become full partners in the educational development of their children;
> (3) assist adults in the completion of a secondary degree. (Workforce Investment Act, 1998, Title II, Sec. 202)

The impacts identified by learners in this study suggest the need for a more complex and nuanced definition of expected outcomes of adult literacy programs.

Work, defined as either "unsubsidized employment" or "career advancement", is among the "core indicators of performance" in the Workforce Investment Act (WIA.) Since enrolling in literacy classes, June, Will, and Suzanne have all entered (or re-entered) employment and Ruth has retained her job, but none of these jobs were better than what they had before participation in adult education. All of the group had worked before enrolling in ABE. Five had been in long-term employment, the three older men in relatively good jobs -- manufacturing, mechanics, trucking. Seven of the ten gave employment-related reasons for enrolling in ABE, but they did not report that participation made a difference in their own employment. This was true even for the two who had passed the GED test: one is retired and not looking for work, the other is working but not at a job that requires a GED. People from this group believe that education and having a GED is important for getting a good job, but this has not been an outcome in their own lives to date. Several hope to take college courses or advanced vocational training, but none has.

Beder's (1999) analysis of outcomes studies and our work on the Longitudinal Study of Adult Literacy Students in Tennessee (2000) did find increased employment as an outcome of adult basic education. But perhaps this way of looking at work and at the role of adult basic education and skill in work is too limited. Even if we accept the premise that adult education should lead to work or increased income, these indicators fail to take into account the factors that affect employment including the availability of jobs. Nor is the kind of job considered. Should we count Ruth's retention of her job cleaning chickens as a positive outcome of her participation in adult education? And how do we measure her new willingness to challenge her supervisor, which may make this retained job more bearable? And what does it mean that Suzanne, who got a GED (another outcome measure), has not been able to find a job that is any better than what she had before? Or that Marvin was able to work as a mechanic and truck driver before he began adult literacy classes? These questions do not deny a connection between literacy skills and work, but suggest that the connections are complex.

Hull (1997) and Hart (1992) among others have questioned the "popular discourse" (Hull, p. 5) of workplace literacy that U.S. workers lack the basic skills for today's jobs, that a new diverse workforce needs functional training, that the U.S. economy is somehow threatened by an underskilled

workforce. Hull argues that, "the popular discourse of workplace literacy tends to underestimate and devalue human potential and to mis-characterize literacy as a curative for problems that literacy alone cannot solve" (p.11). The work experiences of the participants in this study support her argument. Marvin and Will developed valuable workplace skills using learning strategies that did not depend on literacy. On the other hand, Suzanne was not able to find a better-paying job in her rural community even after improving her basic skills and gaining the GED credential.

Family literacy has become an integral part of adult basic education. The second purpose for adult basic education in the WIA is to "assist adults who are parents to obtain the educational skills necessary to become full partners in the educational development of their children" (Workforce Investment Act, 1999, Title II, Sec. 202). The participants in this study reported already being quite involved in their children's education before enrolling in adult education. They reported visiting the school, talking to their children's teachers, and talking to their children about education. They valued education and were committed to their children's education when they enrolled in ABE programs.

We did not find a "cycle of illiteracy" (Darling and Hayes, 1989) in this group. Of their twenty-six children, eighteen had graduated from high school, seven were still in school, one was too young for school, and only one had dropped out. Eight have had at least some college. We did find some changes in regard to family literacy practices in participants in this study, e.g. Marvin, June, and Suzanne talked about reading more to their children as their own reading skills increased. The children who were still in school when their parents enrolled in adult literacy programs may well have been encouraged in their own education by their parents efforts. But the changes reported were few.

The primary reason that we did not find much impact on their involvement in the education of their children was that these families had already been involved in ways that seem to have been effective. Rather than intergenerational illiteracy, we found intergenerational literacy practices that included grandmothers telling life histories to grandchildren, sisters helping each other with course work, parents helping children with homework, preschoolers learning the alphabet from parents and siblings, and parents reading to children and children reading to parents. These findings resonate with those of Auerbach (1989, 1995) and others who found that parents with limited formal education and literacy skills can be quite supportive of their children's education both by valuing learning and by providing a variety of learning opportunities.

Table 17: ABE Participation Goals and Achievements

Participant	Goals	Achievements
Bert	To earn GED in order to attend college to study computers or go to the military	Enrolled in ABE continuing to work toward goal
Elizabeth	To learn to read better, particularly the Bible; education important to her	Reads better; improved math skills
Harry	To earn a GED diploma, to see if he could and because he had always wanted one	Earned GED and received recognition
June	To get a GED for job training and a better job	Has a job; continues to study
Kris	To get off AFDC; to get GED in order to study computers at community college; to provide a better life for her children	Enrolled twice, only briefly
Laura	To learn spelling, reading, math; to better support self and family	Improved reading
Marvin	To learn to read and write; to improve basic skills and self as a citizen	Reading improved; involved in ABE and foster parents organization
Ruth	To get a GED in order to get a better job	Continues in ABE; improved skills
Suzanne	To get a GED in order to get a good job to support children; to prove she could do it	Earned GED; similar job as before
Will	To earn GED after being denied a job because he did not have it; to prove he could do it.	Enrolled and improved basic skills; stopped when he got a new job

Table 17 shows that, with the exception of Kris who has major health problems, everyone reported progress toward their goals. Harry and Elizabeth did what they set out to do, Harry earning his GED diploma and Elizabeth improving basic reading and math skills enough to make a difference in her life. Marvin, as well, reported that his reading has improved enough to enable him to do things he was formerly unable to do. He also has been active as a citizen in a statewide

organization for foster parents. Suzanne also earned a GED, but as yet, does not have a better job. Bert, Ruth, and June all continue their studies and report progress toward their goals. For Will and Laura, goal achievements are more ambiguous. Both report improved skills and new literacy practices, but for neither has this led to better employment. Laura's health problems, and possibly her spelling problems, make many jobs too difficult. When Will found a job, he no longer had time for adult education classes.

So if outcomes of participation in adult education are defined in terms of goal achievement, nine of this group of ten adult learners reported progress toward their goals. Three of them, Harry, Elizabeth and Marvin met their original goals, and Marvin and Elizabeth hope to continue in ABE to learn more.

However, only two of the seven who had the GED as a goal have passed the test. This goal, the GED, is probably the most commonly stated goal of those entering ABE classes (Taylor, 1994). Passing the GED is one of the WIA performance measures. But people who enter ABE with lower literacy skills may need a long time to reach this goal. The experiences of the participants in our study suggest the importance of developing and using other measures, as well, including improvements in literacy skills and changed literacy practices.

Conclusions and Implications

This research focuses on the lives of adult literacy students. There were ten participants, typical in many respects of adults in Tennessee. The findings are based on their narratives and are from their perspectives. The perspective of students in adult basic education, the customers, is a vital one in determining the outcomes of ABE. While we should not assume that the perspective of these particular adults are representative of the wide variety of adults who participate in adult education in the United States, they have given us important insights with implications for those concerned about adult basic education.

The lives of these adults, who were also adult literacy students, are in many ways like those of many adults in this country. They share many of the concerns of other adults including concern for their children's education. They have all worked and in their work have usually been able to overcome any literacy constraints. Many believe that they have been held back by lack of a high school credential and, in some instances, by limited literacy skills. In order to improve their literacy skills or gain a credential, they enrolled in literacy programs. They found that participation in these programs led to changes that include new literacy practices and a more positive sense of self.

We have drawn two main conclusions from this study. First, we found the adults in this study were for the most part, resilient, self-reliant people who valued education and fostered their children's education. They did not fit the image that Quigley (1997) reports is often found in the popular media and in the discourse of the adult education, an image of adult literacy students as people "incapable of helping themselves"(p. 35). These adults had overcome substantial odds to help themselves and their families. We conclude that adult learners' lives and needs cannot be easily categorized.

Second, we found that the outcomes of literacy program participation in learners' lives are diverse, often complex, and determined by individuals' life situations. The meanings of particular outcomes are contextual as well. For example, both Harry and Suzanne passed the GED test, a common outcome measure in ABE. For both, this achievement was a source of satisfaction and pride, but for neither did having a GED have a direct impact on self-sufficiency. Suzanne could not find a better job in her small town, and Harry was already retired. While having the credential may well have long-term impacts for Suzanne, and the accomplishment of this goal may lead to new endeavors for both Harry and Suzanne, the initial achievement had minimal impact. For Elizabeth,

gaining the literacy skills and the particular knowledge needed to fill out a money order led to new independence. A seemingly small achievement has had marked impact in her life. The outcomes of adult literacy programs cannot be determined by a few standardized measures.

For practitioners these narratives offer another way to gain insight into their students' lives. These adults use literacy in many ways in their lives; it is appropriate to have a similar diversity of materials and instructional approaches in the classroom. The wide range of texts in use in people's everyday lives should also be the texts of the classroom. These life stories, themselves, might make a good text for other learners to read, providing points of entry into many different topics including parenting, work life, and examining one's own life history. The learning strategies that people have used outside classrooms can be employed to enrich the learning methods used in classrooms.

This research implies that policy makers should take into account all the reasons people want adult basic education as they develop systems of performance accountability. Many of the approaches now being developed do not measure the primary outcomes reported by the participants in this study: new literacy practices and more positive sense of self. To assess these outcomes may require developing performance-based measures that allow for the interaction of skill, task, and context that seem to define outcomes in real life. A study conducted with a national sample in greater depth than previous research may be needed to understand the outcomes of adult literacy programs.

Of importance to both practitioners and policy makers is what we can learn about our own assumptions from this study. We need to be careful in our assumptions about adult learners. What seems to be "low self-esteem" in an adult learner may be discomfort in a particular situation that is new or associated with failure in the learner's past experience. This same person may well have dealt with other challenges successfully and will draw on their resiliency in the new situation.

We need to continue examining the intersections of education, literacy and employment. We should not assume that because a person is in an adult literacy class, she needs to develop "workplace skills;" she may have worked successfully for years. We cannot assume a need for increased literacy skills on most jobs or that people with limited literacy have no other way of learning work skills. We need to be clear about when new skills are needed and when a credential is being used as a way to "gatekeep" by employers. We need to recognize that while lack of education may get in the way of employment, employment can also be a barrier

to continuing education. Barriers to employment include factors in addition to lack of skills or lack of credentials, and these barriers may by be so great that increased basic skills do not result in changes in employment.

Just as we need to avoid assuming a deficit in the work skills of adult education students, we need to be careful not to assume that limited education or literacy skills means a lack of parenting ability. The ways parents in this study talked about the responsibilities of parenting, as well as the results in terms of high school completion by their children, do not paint a picture of intergenerational illiteracy. Instead we found parents who placed a strong value on education and were deliberate in encouraging their children and supporting their children's learning.

This study suggests both broader and more narrow ways of thinking about adult basic education. On the one hand, we need to define more broadly the outcomes we look for from adult basic education and take into account the varied goals that adult learners bring. We need to recognize the variety of outcomes that improve the quality of life of individuals and communities. These outcomes may include the skills and credentials that can lead to better jobs. They may include more active involvement with children's schools and other community institutions. But outcomes for learners may also be in their personal quality of life, in how they are able to discuss with others what they have read, in new understanding of religious texts, in a sense of accomplishment.

On the other hand, we may need to narrow our expectations of what adult basic education can accomplish. Those who make policy for adult basic education must recognize that improved literacy skills and academic credentials are only one factor in addressing the social problems of this country. The outcomes of adult basic education that the participants of this study identified suggest that increased literacy may be necessary, but not always sufficient to overcome the effects of high unemployment, poor health, inadequate schools, and discrimination. As we determine the outcomes for which programs will be accountable, we need to be clear about what the impacts of programs can be and where they may occur and focus our measurement there. Adult learners have much to contribute to our understanding.

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APPENDICES

Appendix One: Interview One Protocol
Appendix Two: Interview Two Protocol
Appendix Three: Participants' Full Profiles

Appendix One

Interview One Protocol

The interviews for this study will be semi-structured life history interviews. The following questions will serve as a guide for the interviews, with questions to be covered with every participant in bold followed by possible prompts.

Tell me about your life, your family, your work? What is your life like?

Work - This can include paid and unpaid work. Get detail as to what the work involves,
Good and bad things about work, literacy uses.
Family - Spouse? Brothers and sisters, parents? Who so you see often? Everyday?
Children - Ages now, school, worries, pleasures
Other activities: Church, sports, community organizations, hobbies
What do you do for fun?
Places you go beyond work and family? Social agencies?
How's you health? Your family's health?
Where do you shop? Close to home? Economic worries?
Transportation?
Travel?

Think back to when you began in adult education classes. What made you get involved?
Why did you enroll?

Was there anything particular going on in you life that led you to enroll?
Did you think about it a long time?
How did it feel to start?

Tell me about the program, what you did, what you learned?

Materials used
Teaching approaches: one-on-one, group discussion, etc.
Tutor or teacher
Other students
Class met when, where, how often?
Why did you stop going?
Most important thing you learned

Things you liked, didn't like
When I think about the adult ed. program, I wish…

Could you talk some about growing up?

Where family size, good and bad memories. (Good memories of growing up. Was anything hard?)

What was school like for you?

Where did you go?
How long?
Good memories
Bad memories

What would you say is the impact of participating in adult education on your life?

How you feel about yourself? Feel about others?
Is the way you think about your life different?
Taking part in ABE classes could make a difference because of what you study and learn -- reading, math, writing -- and it could make a difference because of who you meet, or other activities in the program. Could you tell me some about how things you studied and learned have made a difference in your life?

Can you tell me some more about your life before you got involved in adult education?

Work
Family
Children - Ages, etc. Issues in raising them if they are older.
Other activities: Church, sports, community organizations, hobbies
What did you do for fun?

Appendix Two

Interview Two Protocol

These second interviews have two purposes:

1. To ask additional questions that we pulled from the data from the first round of questions
2. To ask specific follow-up questions of each person, questions of clarification, in most instances

Questions for all

When we read through the interviews we noticed several things that we wanted more information about. Some of these things you talked some about before, but we'd like to hear more.

General Topics

First, we'd like to hear a little more about growing up. Can you tell us a little more about when you were a child, the first things you remember, the first day at school?

A lot of people talked about hard times or having a rough time growing up. What does that mean to you? What did you have to go without?

How people learn new things is an important part of this project? Can you tell us about a time when you learned something new? To do something new?

Can you tell us about a time that you feel like you really accomplished something?

We are interested in how people deal with different parts of their lives. Do you have to deal with any agencies or government bureaucracies? Which ones? What is this like?

How about health care? Where do you get medical care if you need it? Do you feel like you know as much as you want to about your own health? [Follow up on particular problems that have been mentioned in previous interview.]

Do you have worries about crime for yourself or your family? [if yes:] What do you do to make yourself safer?

Are there things you notice or think about now that you didn't used to? [If yes, after they tell about it, find out about whether ABE influenced this.]

Some of the people we interviewed are men and some women. How is life different for men and women?

Work

We want to be sure we have all the different jobs that this group has done. Will you please list them again.

Can you talk a little about how you got along with others at work, your relationships?

Several people have talked about wanting a better job, or education leading to a better job. What does a better job mean to you?

Do you know anyone who got a better job after getting a GED? Tell us about it.

Adult education

What is a good ABE teacher?
What did you do in class?

Many people talked about computers. Do you think they are important? Why?
What ways have you used computers?

We'd like to make a list of the things people regularly read and write-
+. Can you tell us what you've read this week -- think about the little everyday things.
[If you need prompts to get more: signs, ads, labels, cards, mailboxes, TV ads, church bulletins, mail, "off-on", power, etc. on equipment, brand names, forms]
Are there other things you read sometimes?
Do you read things now that you didn't read before you in adult literacy class?

What have you written the past week? Are there other things you write sometimes? [Prompts: signing forms, lists, greeting cards, calendar notations, reminders, letters.]

Do you write things now that you didn't read before you in adult literacy class?

Several people talked about feeling better about themselves. Can you tell us what that means to you?

Anything else? There were also some individual questions for each participant.

Appendix Three
Participants' Full Profile

Although the participants have already been introduced, and their lives have been described in the sections of the report, these profiles, written largely in their own words, can help the reader to gain better understanding of the lives of these ten people as the context in which literacy outcomes occur.

Bert

Bert, who was in his late twenties at the time of the interview, lived with his mother in a small house in inner Memphis. Although his neighborhood is described as a bad part of town by other Memphis residents, Bert himself said that he did not see any problems there.

> *The neighbors are friendly, and close to the store, no fighting. ... They don't do any killing over here, but probably the other part of Memphis...*

Bert has a brother and a sister both of whom are married and have children. Neither of them graduated from high school although Bert's sister has eventually passed her GED test.

> *My sister, she is in the county, my brother, he is working. But he stays right down the street. I have three nephews.*

Bert was the least open of the ten participants, and we did not learn as much about him as we did about others. Our impression was that he and his mother lived in that neighborhood for a long time, and he certainly attended a school nearby. The good memories Bert has from his school days seem to have little to do with learning.

> *Going out to play in elementary, eating lunch. In junior high - going out for recess, eating lunch, sneaking off to the store. That was about it.*

Bert himself saw his main problem in school as not getting along with other kids.

> *I completed the ninth grade, I got to the tenth grade, and I was having problems with the kids and community, and I dropped out. And then I decided to get my GED and still working on it.*

After he quit school in the ninth grade, he enrolled in an ABE program located in a large adult learning center that houses not only ABE, but also vo-tech classes and adult high school.

> *I wanted to get my diploma and continue my education, go on to college.*

Bert told us that he wanted to go to college and study computers because he saw working with them as easy.

> *If I want to take, like that's a vo-tech, if I want to take trade, like computer, I took introduction to computing and completed. And I'm still working on my GED. And I want to re-enter that course when I complete the GED to refresh my memory on computer.*

Bert has had several factory jobs. He said that he was unable to work physically any more due to a work-related back injury.

> *I was working temporary at different factories... I was doing warehouses, unloading trucks, packing, receiving and shipping. And I was working at the mall, doing janitorial. Then I became disabled, back problem, neck problem.*

He would like to move out of Memphis, perhaps to Atlanta, because he seems to think that there are more chances to find a job, and also there is more to do. Bert says that he has friends he goes out with, usually to clubs, although many clubs are too expensive for them. He also spends some of his leisure time going for a walk or swimming at a community pool.

> *Every day... I get in a car and go down to the river and walk for like hour and a half... And there is a community center, about 20 minutes drive, where there is a pool and everything.*

Bert was the only participant who flatly refused to be interviewed for the second time, so we were not able to find out whether he passed the GED test that he planned to take within a few months after the first interview. The reason he gave for his refusal was, apparently, a misunderstanding about the amount of money he was to receive after the first interview.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth was born in the 1920s in the deep South. She experienced the type of schooling that poor Black children had to go through in the years of open racial discrimination and segregation.

> *When I was a little bitty girl? It was a long [time ago]. When I was a little girl we usually had to chop cotton. We usually couldn't go to school when it was pretty. Only time we could go to school was when it was cold. And there wasn't nothing to do. We usually had to pull cotton, that's why we couldn't go to school. And then we had so far to walk to school when we get to school we'd be so cold you couldn't learn nothing. And then we had to walk so far back. So really it was too far to walk to learn anything in the first place.*
>
> *That school, I know that school was more than two miles. That was a long way to walk. When it's cold. And didn't [have warm] clothes on. One time I got to school I was so cold you know you put your hands to the fire and your hands started thawing up. Whew! That'd make you cry like a baby. But you know I thought we had a hard time coming up, but really I heard a member at church talk, about her past. And I think she had just as rough time as we had. Because I thought we the only body had this time. But I really do because I know a whole lot of children around there doing that time, they didn't have to do the kind of work we did. Like pick cotton, pull cotton. I know we pulled cotton in the frost one time. I been so cold that day we pulled cotton that my shoes come off, I didn't know they were off. My foots were [so] cold. I know you all didn't have to work like that.*

Elizabeth and her eight siblings grew up in rural Mississippi. Out of the nine, *"two, one sister and one brother finish high school."* Elizabeth herself stopped attending school in the eighth grade. She got married and moved to Memphis with her husband.

This marriage ended with divorce, and her subsequent second marriage with separation.

> *See, I don't like no man to talk loud with me. And I sure don't want his hands on me I said I'd rather just be by myself. And I been by myself 20 years. Me and my God, we been having a good time. I ain't got nobody to say, "Where you been? Why you stayed out so late?" - "I been to church." - "Well how come does church last so long?" All that stuff, you know.*

Another thing Elizabeth did not like about being married is lack of trust in financial matters.

> *Spend you money like you want and you have don't ask nobody about it. It shouldn't be like that because I think, two people working, they should put their money together and have something, you know, but people are not going to do that. For one's putting away the other's trying to have something, the other putting away. It takes both jobs to work to have something. That's why I knew I wasn't gonna never have nothing because I didn't have no husband would want nothing. I knew what time I get rid of him I'd do better by myself. Didn't need to help, that's right.*

She had six children, all daughters. Two of six daughters died as young adults: one in a car accident, the other from cancer. Her other children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren

> *are nice, all of them nice. They treat me nice. I guess, it's the way you treat them. You children get the way you treat the children that's the way they're gonna treat you, you know. Treat them good when they're children, they're gonna treat you right when they get big. You don't say anything in front your of children, do anything in front of your children, you ain't gonna have no problem with them.*

Her children's education was very important for Elizabeth, especially because she herself did not have this chance when she was young.

> *I said the same thing when I was a little child. I said whenever I get, if I ever do get grown and have any children, I said my children ain't going to pick cotton like this. I said, I'm gonna let my children go to school. I said it and I meant it. Every one of my children went to school and finished high school. Some have been to college. One of my daughters she studies to be a social worker I've got one daughter, she's doing computer work. All my grand-daughters, they finished high school, too. My grandson the only one ain't finished high school now. I've got one grand-daughter, she works, she cleans teeth, a den[tal hygienist].*

Elizabeth's children have been helping her with reading and writing, and they encouraged her to go to adult classes, and she is glad to be more independent in everyday literacy functioning.

> *They were so glad when I went back to school When I was going to school [for the first time] my daughter said, "Mama, where you been?" And I was all ready to go ahead and lock, the mop handle on the floor, ready to put my clothes on. And I just went over there and signed up for it. And then she called me later and said, "Mama where you was when I came by there?" I said, "I went over to school." She said, "Why?" I said, "Sign up for a class." And they were so glad they didn't know what to do. They were really happy. [I] said, "I don't have to be getting you to fix my money order now. Fix my own money order out." I fill all my own money order and everything.*

Before she retired in 1995, Elizabeth had for a long time worked at a restaurant not far from a public housing apartment complex where she lived for over forty years.

> *I'd been there [in the restaurant] 29 years.*
> *Wash dishes, and make salad and cook and everything else for five dollar an hour. I'm gonna to tell it like it is, five dollar an hour, yeah. But it was, it was OK when I was working, because we didn't work hard, nothing like that you know. But [the owner] was kind of mean.*
> *My legs hurt sometime. My arms hurt sometime. Walking around on that concrete floor, too. Sometimes we real busy. You got something to do, you don't have time to eat lunch or whatever. You just work on through your thing. And when we weren't busy, didn't have too much to do, you know she don't want you to even take a break. That woman was something else. Her own daughter talk about her. Said, "Mama know she ain't right." Said, "She know she don't treat help right. You all work like I don't know what, then when it's kind of slow, she's looking for stuff for you to do."*

Our first interview was conducted in the apartment that was Elizabeth's home for so long. She was in the process of packing to move to another apartment because this complex was about to be remodeled. Elizabeth, however, had already had a similar experience and was skeptical, although she agreed that something had to be done with the place.

> *But see, they're not gonna fix this place back like it is now. They're gonna tear this part down rights here. They'll make a lot of space so they can see round it cause so much's going on over here. Said the police can't even get through here because this place is jammed too close together. Which they're right about that, too. What they're talking about doing, it's gonna look good now. But see, we can move back now, if we want to. But if it*

look like they say it gonna look, I might move back. But I don't believe it gonna look like that. Because I believe they're gonna run out of money. But I hope they get it fixed up, you know. Because it needs to be fixed up, because there ain't no sense to be having a place this close downtown and looking like this now. Like a ghost town. You go on through, it looks like a ghost town. You haven't seen anything. It look OK up here, but go on down a little further. I'm scared to walk down there by myself.

No matter how hard her life has been, Elizabeth seems content with it. On the two occasions we have seen her, she was cheerful, and her conversation wise and humorous. She seems to have established her priorities, philosophically putting education among the highest, and material possessions among the lowest. She looks back and finds good things in her past, just as in her present.

But my life now, since I got grown now, they were the best times of my life. Because I didn't have to do... I did what I wanted to do, not pick no cotton, you know what I am saying? I like to go to church, and I like to go to Bible class. I ain't too crazy about eating now, too much food. I don't like to cook [after working in a restaurant for 29 years]. I like to travel. Me and my sister travel together now. [She mentions trips to California, Virginia, Florida, and Chicago]. Like you said about that two million, if I ever win that two million I never would get through. I'd stay on an airplane. I'd get on there and say take me as far as [you go]. I might be old, but I'm still gonna travel.

I had a pretty nice husband during the time the children were small. And we always did have somewhere to stay, you know, food to eat. It was a good life. But now it's better because I ain't got to work. I just make my check do, what I get. And people holler, you can't live without a lot of money, and all that stuff. You can live off just what God blessed you with, you'll be able to make it.

Although Elizabeth stopped coming to literacy classes after moving to her new apartment, she believed that she had benefited from participation and was able to do the things she needed. She seems to be the kind of a person that takes what life gives her and makes the best out of it. We think that her sense of humor and good temperament have helped her in that.

Harry

Harry was 73 years old at the time of our first interview with him but looked a lot younger. His family were White sharecroppers and lived on a farm till he was 12 years old when they moved in a small town in Middle Tennessee. The family was poor.

> *I lost out on lots and lots of things that other kids have. And when I was growing up at Christmas time up to I was 12 years old, we was on the farm. If we'd get sòme firecrackers, that's all we got for Christmas. And one pair of shoes and one pair of overalls. And you was lucky to get that.*

Harry went to school to the eighth grade, his first years spent in a little country school with six grades for one teacher.

> *But back in my day, I didn't even get to start at school until I was eight year old and I got through the eighth at 16. I didn't fail any but I didn't get started. But I say, still though, when I finished eighth grade, I still knew a lot more than a lot of these high school people got out of high school.*

At 16, Harry quit school because he wanted to help out at home.

> *Back then, I worked at the grocery store for 3 dollars a week to help out at home. And my dad wasn't making anything so I had to quit school to help out. And I went to work for 25c an hour. And I was drawing $10 a week but they was taking out one cent of dollar for income tax. And then I finally got nickel raise. And then when I turned 18, the war was on and so I went to Michigan, worked in defense plan. So I've saw the hard times. And nowadays you all don't know what it was back in forties, through the depression.*

After his work at a defense plant, Harry stayed in Michigan for many years. He told us about his long history during our first interview in the small house in which he came to live and take care of his old mother after half of a life time in Midwest.

> *I went to Michigan in 1952 and went to work up there in a factory. And I worked for 22 and a half years and I missed seven days work. And so when the plant closed there, well they wanted to send me to Alabama as a foreman, and I wanted to come back here. [In Michigan] we made car moldings on the inside and outside and all that. And I was a buffer and*

polisher. And on the last, I was a leader in my department. And then to go back from that, I was on construction work for about 5 years, and then back past that, during the war I was in Michigan working in a defense plant. And before that I went to work at 16 in a harness shop here in [home town]. So I had 2 years there and about 4 years in Michigan and about 5 years in construction and 22 and a half years at one place, and then from 1976 until 90 I worked at a [construction company in the home town].

In Michigan, Harry got married and had two daughters.

When I went to Michigan 1952, I met a lady and we got married, and I have two children, and one of them's 40, one is 43. And I was divorced when my kids were 4 and 7, and I got my children, and I raised them. So when I got ready to come down here after my job played out, they didn't want to come. So, they got married up there then. So, I've been single for many, many years.

It was not easy to be a single father at the times when such a situation was still uncommon.

Kids needs mother and dad both at home. And it was hard on me, I wasn't making any money much and paying a babysitter, and they didn't have what they needed and really wanted but they had it a lot better than I had. At least, I bought a new home and we all had our own bedrooms, it was 3-bedroom. So, that's the only thing I tell them now, say, you all might give up a lot of things but at least you had your own bedrooms, you always had plenty to eat, and you had clothes, it might not been the best, but you had more than I had. And so, I guess, they are trying to see that their kid gets more than what they had. But, like I say, I had some tough times in my lifetime but everything's all right now.
I went to work many a time that I didn't have even a dime for a cup of coffee. And you got two kids, and I never got one dime support for the kids from her or from the government, anybody. I mean, nowadays, women they can go out here and have 3 or 4 kids, they've got it better than a man working. There wasn't but one time that I asked for help, that I stood out below ~~zero~~ for about two or three hours and when I got up there, they said, all, we'll just give you some commodities: dried beans, rice, and cheese and stuff like that. That's way back in the fifties. And I was so hard up, I took them. And that's the only time. But they wouldn't give me nothing because I was a man, I reckon.

During our two interviews, Harry told us what he did at his work both in the factory in Michigan and at the manufacturing corporation in Middle Tennessee.

> *I worked out of purchasing department. And so I did all the running around, picking up, had to go get the mail in the morning and take it back in the afternoon. But I'd go to all the cities [in Middle Tennessee], I've been to Alabama, pick up stuff. Anyway, just general, you know, run-about guy. And I trained [others for a similar job].*

Besides truck driving, Harry also worked at the shop. We asked him if he used reading, writing and math in his work.

> *In Michigan on the job 22 and a half years, well you had to figure up all your parts and everything every day. And as far as math, I mean, I knew that A-1... I've used math in every job I had. Out here at ___ corporation, you had to know reading and writing and math and all that, you didn't have to know algebra and geometry, but on the truck, you had to keep up with everything.*

In his whole career, Harry missed very few work days. His health has been generally good although he

> *had a heart surgery back in 1984, but I was laid off at the time, and so they wasn't paying the insurance on it. I had to pay it off as I could. But anyway, I am blessed, I reckon, with pretty good health. And I know of a lot of people that's had surgery about around my time or after, and they are not here now. You just count your blessings, I guess.*
> *Four by-passes...but it didn't seem to affect my work, and I had to go ahead and pick heavy stuff up, and do everything, you know, normally. If you can't do a job, you don't stay. So I did it.*

All his life Harry has maintained a positive attitude and now, after his retirement he tries to "take it easy" and enjoy his free time.

> *I got a brother, lives next door, and I've got one lives on the other side of town. And my mother and dad, they are dead. And I got a sister in Memphis, so there's just three boys and one girl. My mother, she passed away about 12 years ago. My dad has been dead about 40 years. So, I just live here by myself now. But a lot of people say, don't you get lonesome, I say, heck no. If I get bored sitting around the house, I go somewhere. I go*

out and eat a lot. So, I mean, you make your own life. I mean, you just sit and worry yourself to death about something, or else you have a positive attitude and I look to the future all the time. And knowing all the time, this might be my last day but, I guess when the Lord comes or calls you, well you're going. So, but I just figured out, I want to do things 6 months or a year ahead, but in the back of my mind I think, well, if I'm not here to do it, it can't make no difference anyway.
And I've been going with the same lady, I've known her for about 20 years. And I've been going pretty regular for about 15. But I still don't want to get married. Having somebody to go places with, and we go to concerts sometime. And I'd take her [wherever she needs to go], she don't drive. And I'm doing things around the house all the time, trying to make it a little bit better.

All his life Harry has worked hard to achieve his goals. His positive attitude and persistence helped him overcome many challenges in life. Passing the GED was one of such challenges, and he is very proud of being able to do it.

June

June was born in a rural county in East Tennessee, the seventh out of nine children, in a poor White family. She says that even at a young age she understood the circumstances that poverty created for herself and her family.

> *Of course, there was nine of us, we all understood. Was like, clothes, a lot of kids get clothes, like before school starts. Well, we always got clothes at Christmas time, was our new clothes time. We appreciate what we got. You know, as far as not getting it, if we didn't get, we understood why we didn't get it. We didn't go around griping and crying, we understood why we didn't get stuff....It really didn't, at the time it probably did bother us, but as a day or two went by, it's like a phase you go through, but we understood. You know, which I'm glad Mama... did do us that way because me, myself, well all my sisters and brothers learned, if we want something we don't have the money to get it, we know, we make do with what we got. We know how to do it because that's how she raised us. Make do with what you got, and get it later on.*

Soon, the family moved to Knoxville. After a long marriage, their mother left her husband because

> *He stayed drunk. You know, he worked, he got up and worked but it was when he come home, it was drinking. And we just, you know we just didn't bother. And mama, she worked all the time. So basically we were there all day by ourselves, had to cook for ourselves while she worked. And that's how we was raised.*

In the tenth grade June dropped out of high school when she was pregnant:

> *And I went to [high school], then half-way through the tenth grade I quit. I had doctor's orders to quit, and back then, I was already married and I took the doctor's statement that I had to be at home all day, you know, because if I don't, I'm going to lose this kid, and he said: "Well, if you want to keep continue going to school, you'll have to pay for homebound teaching." Which back then, I didn't have no money, I didn't work. And I couldn't go back after that.*
> *I can't remember the principal at that time up there. My Mom even went up there, and he told her the same thing.*

June has two girls and has stayed at home raising them during most of her married

life. She had jobs occasionally but did not have any of them for a long time because of childcare reasons and because sometimes *"people bullies you."* When her children were fourteen and two, she separated from her husband.

For many years June has lived in the apartment complex where her mother is a manager.

> *She lived here fourteen years, she's been a manager for ten years now. Can't get her retire, she's 64 years old, she won't retire. My brother offered to go get her a house and move in and everything. – "No, I'll just stay here."... I told her, you gripe all day long, but you enjoy every bit of what you're doing. And she does. She deserves what she gets, you know, she worked hard all her life. She started out at 15 working.*

The mother has always been very close to June and her siblings.

> *She is one of them hillbillies. Can tell you everything about the farm. She used to tell us, we used to ask her opinion on something. "Well, when I was a kid, it's the way it was done." We just want the opinion, mama, not the story. And she'd tell us the whole story. We'd sit there for hours listening to her. "OK, what's the point in that story now, mama?" – "Well, use your own option..." ... She would tell us a real good stories, back then when it happened, about the ... depression and all that. She'd tell us a story and all that. It's just amazing to find out how this stuff happened.*

The brothers and sisters, however, do not see each other regularly, although all of them live in the same city. During our first interview June told us that she was only close to one of her sisters.

> *I don't hardly talk to none of them. I talk to one of my sisters, that's it. The rest of them, I don't. They got their opinion; I got my opinion. They don't like my opinion, so they don't bother with me.*

June is close to her children, and their education is important to her. Her younger daughter, says June, is very intelligent for her age: *"She comes in and has to read a book. I collect them books for her, kids books, and she's got about three shelves nothing but books, and I have to read every one of them to her."* Reading with her daughter was until recently hard for June but she has "learned herself" and became better at it. Her older daughter Kelly has been big support for June during her separation from her husband: *"Me and her daddy separated, she said, 'Don't worry, Mommy, I'll be right here with you.' You know, she's helped with [the little*

one], plenty of time." Kelly was in part responsible for June's decision to enroll in adult education classes:

> *Well Kelly called me a dummy, one time. She said, "Mama you are a dummy, don't know how to read or learn nothing." I said, "No, I could prove it to you." And I did, I've got, I can't remember that woman's name down there at the [local welfare] program? I talked to her and she got me started going down ...*

June calls Kelly *"my coach, she'll coach me, drag me up there."* However, she did not stay in the adult basic education program very long.

> *I went through, like the school year, ... and they wanted me to go through summer, and I told them I couldn't because at that time I only had [one daughter], and didn't have nobody to watch her. And then when I supposed to have started back, that's when I got pregnant with [the second daughter]. And doctors said: no, you can't go, can't be walking out in the street because you'll lose the kid. Right before that, during that summer, I had a miscarriage and didn't know it and about a year later, that's when I got pregnant..., and they said, no, it's hot out, you can't walk it, you'll lose this child. Wait till after you have it, and then... decide. If it wasn't for that, I'd still be up there.*

During our first interview June was unemployed. She said that she wasn't

> *Looking real hard [for a job]... I want to try and wait till [the younger daughter] goes...full time to school, that way I'll know where she is, and who I need to get to watch her after school. So right now, I basically not – I looked and checked on some. But usually if you ain't got high school diploma, "we can't use you."*

If she had a choice, said June, she *"would rather go into like management, hotel management and stuff."* She was confident that her math skills were sufficient to work with money, and that she had learned enough from her mother to perform well on such a job. However, going to a job interview presented a major problem for her. June generally was not comfortable around strangers.

> *I feel like they judge me. I don't mind, some of the places I don't mind. Ah! When you meet the person who is going to... decide whether they're going to hire me, they ...look at me and, you know, it might be me, it might not be them, it makes me feel like they are judging me for who I am, how I*

> *dress, not for what I know. ...I feel uncomfortable with it... I'm the type, I don't like wearing dresses, and in some ways, I don't mind going out and meeting the public, and in other ways – I will not go out to eat... Because people stares at me, and I know they are staring at me. ...It's been three years since I went and saw a movie, actual movie. I stay home.*

Being in school, in class with other people also made June nervous: *"Yeah, I was always like that. I used to pass out on the first day of school. Every year, I'd pass out. Mom said, "There wasn't a year go by, I had to come get you."* This nervousness has been part of the reason why June did not go back to adult basic education classes. Instead, during the year between our first and second interview with her she enrolled in a "high school by correspondence" and enjoyed working independently with the materials they send her, even though there is a monthly fee.

But enrolling in school wasn't the only change in June's life during that year. She also started working in the kitchen of a nursing home in the afternoons.

> *Well, my job is to, like, we got a hot serving, we serve hot food to the patients, we take turns, people take turns putting them on the plate, and then we work on dishes, cleaning the dishes up. And we serve the patients in the dining room. And basically, keep the kitchen clean, keep the snacks going to the patient at the right time they are supposed to get it....Different things different days that you go in.*
>
> *The only thing we look at that we have to read is like the patient's name and what is type of diet. Like if it's regular, you know, regular food. And they got dots for that. But I don't use the dots. I read, I am better at reading them – because it's simple words.*

In the mornings, she works cleaning the apartments of the complex where she continues to live and where her mother is a manager. *"The only thing I do, like, if a tenant move out, they might live here like a week or two, I go in and clean the place and help re-rent it and stuff."* For the first time in her life, June has opened a checking account.

June even looked different this year – younger, thinner. She realized that a lot changed in her life in the past year, and we asked her to tell us more about the reasons for this change.

> *I got tired looking at people, the way their life is. And my fifteen-year old was, 'Well Mom, you ain't going to be nothing but a housewife anyway...' – 'Well, no, I don't think so. You know, Mama's still, I might be old but I still can go.' And I just... got pretty disgusted with myself one day, just like, I call it aggravation and stuff, and I went to bed and I said, 'Well, tomorrow is going to be a better day. But it can't be better unless you make it better.' So I just woke up and just started changing everything.*

The change also may have had to do with June's health. For several years, she has had diabetes, and was overweight and inactive physically.

> *I just want something better for my kids. You know, I want my kids educated, I want them to do what they want to do in life,... I want to see to that. I want to stick around, make sure they are going to get it. You know, and I guess that last time I went to that doctor, and my sugar was 264, and they was freaking me out, and he said, 'You are going to have a stroke, you are going to have a heart attack, you keep going on like this.' I guess, it took that doctor to really [make me say to myself]: "Wake up and see the light, girl, this is your life, you are too young to be doing this." And then I thought and looked at these people around here, the way they are living, and I don't want this for my kids.*

The neighborhood they live in is not very safe, and also makes June worried for her children's future.

> *Well, a week ago we had a good day, we had police sit out here all night long, keep the drug dealers away and everything. But it's like, they turn that corner, here they come. They don't bother me. And I ask them, you know, politely [?] leave away from my house. I don't want it around my kids. And they leave, they know who I am, they'll leave, they don't want to hear my mouth. So they'll leave. I don't let my kids out because of that point. Now, that's pretty bad when you can't let your kids out to play or nothing. But I got 2 little girls that understand, you know, "no, we ain't going out" because they don't want to get involved in that. My oldest one knows what drugs is, you know, they taught her a lot in school about it, and she stays away from it. She don't want it around her or her sister.*

So far, Kelly is doing well in school and plans to go to college. And June's younger daughter attends pre-school, learns to read, and is fascinated with computers. June continues to study by correspondence for her high school diploma.

Kris

Kris was born in Ohio in 1968. Her father has for many years worked for a chain of pizza restaurants, and the family moved quite often. Kris remembers moving to several different states, going to several different schools, some of which were very different from others.

> *Tennessee schools are totally different from Mississippi schools... I mean as soon as I moved to Tennessee, I knew the stuff, but they were still giving me D's and C's when I made in Mississippi A's and B's. I can't explain that.*

There were four girls and one boy in the family, only two of whom graduated from high school. Kris herself dropped out in the ninth grade because at that time she wanted to go work.

> *I was 16, didn't want to go to school. I just quit and got a job.*

At 16, she was hired at a chicken factory. She remembers her first job as hard. She did not stay at that job for very long because

> *It's messy. You know, I just... I didn't really like it. When I was 16, I was lazy. I didn't want to get up and go to work, you know, that type.*

A couple of years later, Kris got married and had three children. Later on, she divorced her husband.

> *He's in jail right now... He was paying child support. Then all of a sudden he just stopped. Then they arrested him, for what, I have no idea.*

When we interviewed Kris, she was living in a public housing apartment in a small town in Middle Tennessee. Her children at the time were seven, eight, and nine. Kris was involved in their schooling.

> *My oldest son doesn't need no help at all. He just whizzes through it like nothing. Every now and then my daughter will say, you know, "Explain this to me," and I go and explain it to her. My youngest son, he always needs help. I make them explain it to me, to see if they know how to do it, and if they do, I say - well, just do it that way each time, and than you'll get it right on the nose.*

Kris described her children and responsible and independent, good helpers at home which is especially important for Kris because she herself is often sick (she has a serious digestive disease).

> *I can't do much, so... I'll usually let them bake a cake. I can't get out and wrestle and run and play. But I'll let them do other things. Like, we cut. You know, if my seven-year-old wants to cut some paper, I'll just get one and cut with him. I let them make cakes, cookies... They do really good. They make a cake better than I do... My nine-year-old, he can make spaghetti, he can make grilled cheese.*

When her children started school, Kris worked for a while as an assistant manager at a pizza restaurant.

> *You got to make sure that other people come in. And if they don't, you got to make sure have backup. It's more or less like a manager's job, but you don't have the authority to hire or fire, that's the only difference. ... Make sure it's, everything is set up for the morning, make sure that it's clean and stuff... I loved it.*

However, her health problems made it very hard for Kris to continue work where she had to be on her feet a lot. Partly because of her health condition, Kris decided that her only way to provide decent living for herself and her children was to try to go to college and go get an "office" job.

> *I've been out of school for a long time, and I want to go working with computers, at [local community] college. But they are trying to help me get my GED first before I can get into that class... I want to get a decent job, to where I don't have to do all the running...If I want to get a job where, like a secretary, or working in an office, or something like that, that I don't have to do a lot of walking. Because, I mean, my kids, we are not going to live where we are at for all the rest if my life, you know. I want to get the kids whatever they want, and I can't do it without a GED and a good job.*

Financially, Kris struggles to support herself and her children. Her parents and sibling have been helping her, and the whole family is very close.

> *I only got, what, 20 dollars out my whole check a month to live on... But if I need anything other than... if it costs more that $20, I just go get my Mom: "Hey, I need this." She'll get it.*

Kris's father helped her to get a car she drives. For a long time she and her children lived in her parents' trailer (later, she was able to move into a municipal three-bedroom apartment). She hopes that her parents will also help her to buy a computer so that she could continue her hobby - surfing the Internet, as well as other computer activities.

> *My sister had showed me, and ever since then I couldn't get off it... I was an Internet freak, but I moved up here so I don't have access. I made cards, you know,... signs for my kids. And every now and then my Dad would have me to type up a bid that he was doing... But I'm wanting to get a computer for my house so the kids can work on it, and maybe at night get on the Internet.*

Kris enrolled in ABE classes twice, and both times she dropped out. Although she seems motivated enough to further her education, financial and health-related barriers in her life are making it very difficult to achieve her educational goals.

Laura

Laura was born in the fifties in a little town in Mississippi. There were seven children and the family was poor.

> *So I, just being in that little town, I hadn't been exposed to the world, really, I was just there in that little town. And very seldom we got to go to town, as a child, it's just maybe on Easter. We would go on Easter, before that Sunday came about, we would go to town, Mom would, have the kids gather up and take them to town to buy clothing to wear to church and what have you. And most of our clothing was, you know, give to us from the White people in the community that Mom worked for. And as we got older, we would pick cotton and made money, and we got our school clothes and paperwork, and what have you. And most of the books we got then was books passed out to us from the White school. And that was better than nothing, not having books at all in the school. But I just didn't have that little help, and that was other children that was slower than I was that didn't get help and what have you.*

Growing up like that was hard for Laura: *"I felt unloved. I felt like a dummy because no one would take up time with me because I knew I was slow in school, and I just didn't want to live."* Only later did Laura realized that difficulties she had in school were because of a learning disability. During her school years, however, she had to find strategies that helped her "keep up."

> *As a child, my sisters and things, I asked them to help me with my homework, even my baby sister, I have three baby sisters under me. And she knew how to read, Mary, my sister... She knew how to read before she started school, and I would go to her for help because it's like she was so smart, and she was impatient with me also, so I left her alone, to help me with my homework. And, I've start trying to get help from the students in school. They would take their time with me so much until they would get bored with me like, "You can't catch on to this, you know." So, eventually I just started faking and bluffing my way through, and I graduated. But I just wasn't where I wanted to be in my learning.*

Even though she has a high school diploma, Laura still has hard time reading and writing, and it made it difficult for her to keep employment, especially because her multiple health problems (hemorrhaging, dizziness, gastro-intestinal and limb pain) did not allow her to do heavy physical work.

I know there is a lot of things that I can do in this world, but I feel confined because of my spelling, my reading... Because even when there have been jobs come through in the past where I could answer telephone and take notes, I couldn't do it because I didn't know how to spell that well, for, you know, to pass them along to my boss. And I was getting very nervous. Even when I took the nursing assistant, if you had to take notes and write about your patients and what happened for the day. And then it come to the place I don't know how to spell this, I'm getting nervous and tense, and that worked on my nervous system. And I just found myself coming home, I always cried a lot, and sometimes even talk about it makes me teary.

Stress and nervousness, as well as poor work conditions made Laura to quit her housekeeping job.

And that made me feel good that I was at least doing something useful to help others, but that got on my nerves so bad, and the chemicals and stuff where I had to spray to try to disinfect stuff, was messing with me, and that real nasty stuff was nerving me so bad, and I had very bad nerve problems, and I ended up having to leave...

Both Laura's marriages ended in divorce, although she had very different relationships with her first and second ex-husbands.

I was married to my first husband and the father of my children which is very sweet person. And it looks like me wanting to divorce at the time, and he's just been very dear to me, and we seem to be getting along better since we went our separate ways than when we were together. So we've always been here for the kids, and one another more so. I remarried and it was like out of the skillet into the fire.
My second husband, he was alcoholic so bad until I had to move out. Well I had a court of law to help him to move out and then we sold the house because it was my first husband had left the house for me and my children. And he was cheating on me, too. And as he moved out, he moved in with another woman, and he was living with her all these years.

When her children were growing up, Laura was supporting their education. Like herself, both children had learning disabilities, and Laura worked with their schools to help them.

I've come to that conclusion myself when my son and my daughter. My

daughter, I could help her to a certain point in her classes of schooling, from elementary to high school. Elementary, I did pretty good with helping them. And after it got to a certain point, I couldn't, and that's when I reached out into the school system, and they would help my children with what they were having difficulty, and especially my son, he have a learning disability... So they reached out to help him with his. He's been going to [a state university] to become electrical engineer and that's something he wanted to ever since he was in... elementary school. And he stuck with that. And he's been a very active child, in the band, ROTC, president of the class.... And ran track. So he's just been a very active person, and he always, you know, done his homework and stuff, come home and study, when he had a difficulty with it, we would go to his guidance teacher and they would, you know, seek help with him, too, to deal with things to the place where they would allow to take a tape-recorder in the classroom, to copy his notes and what have you. So he is doing pretty good.

And my daughter, she went to [a community college] for a little bit when she come out of high school... But she just, she really wanted to go to Ball of Fashion beauty school because she was really into that. But I just couldn't afford it, and plus I felt she wasn't ready for that quick change from [home town] to Atlanta, I just felt like they'd swallow her up down there, and being green and everything, you know. So, I said, just see if you can make it here at your home town. And if you can make it here, you can make it anywhere. She have done stand-up comedian, she has done some modeling... And, well,... she also helped children, underprivileged children that's in drugs and what have you. And she worked at [a]... junior high school with the children there. And she also worked with children, special children. And she got married, she married John that was here from Memphis going to [college] to become a lawyer, and he was here a week before last to take his bar exam, and she was with him. And they reside in Memphis, where his home town is. And she's working with children there. She said she wanted to go back to school, she wanted to enroll in school to help her with her schooling, to become a teacher maybe. ... I just seeked the right help for my children, while in the little town where I come from, Mom and Dad just never had the time or realized, them having so many children till they just couldn't deal with it, or didn't think about it, or didn't realize it....

Helping her children, Laura found out a lot about learning disabilities which helped her make a connection with her own difficulties in school. She realizes

now that, had times and circumstances been different, she could have been able to read an write for all these years.

> *And that's when I realized: I must have had a learning disability that no one back then knew about or understood, or it was so many children in one class that the teacher had also to deal with. And my Mom and Dad worked all the time being farmers and what have you. And then my Mom had 7 children till I didn't want to really worry her because she would be so tired when she got in from work. And my Dad, he did not how to read because he didn't go to school because he was a boy, he had to stay home and help with the farming and gathering crops and what have you. And so, he didn't get the education he needed. And that's where I was at that time. But realizing I had a learning disability, that's what I've come to when I was dealing with my son at [the high school].*

Now Laura lives by herself in a subsidized apartment is in an area of a city in East Tennessee where she has concerns about her safety.

> *And it's very tense living here in this apartment, well this neighborhood. Someone is shooting, someone has shot in my bedroom and it just so happened that I was up here in the living-room when the bullet came through the bedroom there. And I hear sometimes like they are outside the door here shooting and you're you know, jumping, jerking, and kind of ducking, thinking no bullet don't come through.*
> *I have no idea [what it is about]. All I know is that there are drug sellers in the neighborhood next door, and people, they come and get whatever and go on.*

Laura had minimal income, her health problems becomes worse with age, and she tries to fight her depression by keeping active.

> *I have no income. My daughter, she may buy me things when she can afford. Their dad, he helps me out financially... And when my son, he worked a part-time job, he helped... But basically, I feel like I'm in prison some days, you know, but it's a kind of freedom prison because I do get out...But me, you know, it's just going to church, choir rehearsal, grocery store, laundrymat and back home. And if it wasn't for my church, to sing in the choir, go to Bible study, prayer meeting, and work with children..., and the church Sunday school people, ...I would probably lost my mind by now.*

Church is one of the most important things in her life; occasionally, she is able to visit her children and siblings, and recently, she sought help from the local mental health agency. It is hard for her to look and be cheerful, but she tries. "*And there's a lot of times that I would just try to block the expression on my face, and be cheerful, although the inside of me is eating out.*" She re-enrolled in adult education classes, and was considered a possibility of attending art or photography classes in some of the local community college.

> *Photography and art is what I am looking at right now. But it has been kind of shaky, I haven't had anyone to talk to about these things, I haven't been out to the school, [community college] to, you know, talk to anyone. And that's my next step, if I get the nerves and the strength to go. Right now I got an appointment with [mental health center] to talk with them and see if they can help me on some things where I am having problems, just trying to cope with life itself right now.*

Laura seemed to be "stuck" at that point of her life. However, she was trying to bring new things in her life to help overcome poverty, loneliness, and depression.

Marvin

Marvin, a man in his fifties, lived all his life in a rural West Tennessee county. When Marvin was a child, Marvin had to cope with the death of his father. One of the impacts of this death was that Marvin was only able to go to school to the fifth grade.

> *I am going to say that back when I was a kid, about nine-ten years old, my father died. I really never got a chance to go to school because my mother never have really worked. My father always done all the working taking care of us. I started to work at about ten to try to take care of my mother. When we got to where we could kind of be able to live above a strain, I was ... I had missed too many days, too many years out of school. But I always ... never gave up on my dream that I was going to try too read and to write.*

The little time that Marvin did go to school, before his father's death, was also often interrupted by the necessity to work.

> *I was going to school but I didn't get a chance to go every day. Because back then, if you was able to pick cotton and chop, when summertime come, whenever cotton chopping time come, school would shut down, we would have to go to the field. _____ So you didn't get very much time in school because you had to stop and come home and pick your crop. And that's the way things were back then. The tiny little time that I did have in school, I forgot it all when my father died.*

For several years, Marvin was working on other people's farms, sharecropping. He has bitter memories of those days of hard work that must have seemed so unfair for a little boy.

> *Like I say, my life was never easy when I was coming up. Had a hard life. Always had to get out in the snow and ice and try to make a living for me and my mom. Like I say, I had days when I should have been home in by the fire was out trying to make a living when other children was at home being warm. Those days is gone and I made it through them.*

When he was old enough, he worked for "a little old factory" nearby.

> *And I was lucky enough, I worked on a farm and I got a job at the factory I was telling you about. And then my boss, what I worked for on the farm,*

his wife got sick and he had to quit farming so he recommended me to [a farm equipment distributor].

Marvin ended up working for this plant for 26 years. His lack of literacy skills did not prevent him from becoming a good mechanic and truck driving, particularly because Marvin had a very good memory and an ability to learn fast from other people, usually by the way of "hands-on."

But my dreams and my goals was, I always want to be truck driver and a mechanic. I made those goals. I was good mechanic and didn't have no education. I could work on diesel and gasoline engines. Because I would watch other peoples. And I was good, I'm real good at that. If I see you do something, I guarantee you, I'll pick it up the next five minutes. And that's the way I made it. I learned by just storing up stuff in my head. I've seen something done, and I would store it up, and I would go back and do it. And someone could show me something on a piece of paper, and just tell me what it were, I would store it up. And I could go to that place or do that, but as far as writing it down, I cannot do it. Because I didn't have the education.
But, like I say, I made my goals. I was a truck driver, drove a truck for [the company] for 18 years. I was a mechanic for 10 of those years.

After a workplace back injury, Marvin took an early retirement. About five years after that, he enrolled in a literacy class.

I was talking to someone that was going to literacy school, and I got to talking to my wife about it, and she says, "Yes, you ought to go." - "No, not me. I ain't going there and sit up with all of them [young] folks." But she kept talking and persuaded me, and I went out there and I got to say there was more folks sitting out there that was older than I was, 60-70 years old. One lady graduated that night, she was about 65 years old, and she graduated and was moving on to better and bigger things. And I said, "Hey, this is what I want to do!" And that's when I started. And I enjoyed it, I loved it.

Unfortunately, after two years Marvin's health problems became worse, and he was unable to continue attending the class. Marvin's wife who works as a "nursing supervisor" in a hospital, has been a source of support and encouragement for him. This is his second marriage; both of them have grown children from previous marriages. Marvin has five children, all of whom graduated from high school, and one has graduated from college.

> *The other ones, I got one of them that's kind of, he's got his own business, he does roofing and he builds utility houses. And I got two of them working together, and they got their own business. And one of my daughters, she still go to [a state 4-year college]. And one of them already graduated. The children, they turning out pretty good.*
> *I teached them the right way to whatever they get they need to work for it.*

Marvin and his wife are now involved in foster parents organization.

> *And my wife, she wanted foster kids, and I said, hey, whatever you want, we're gonna do this. And we went back into children again, I did, second time around.*
> *We travel sometime, me and my wife, and we go to different meetings, to try to learn more about how to tend the foster children, to take care of them. So many things that we don't know. And we go to those meetings, and find out new ideas, and people always, there's always somebody there that comes up with new ideas of how to raise children... It tells you what you can do and what you can't do, and what's going on and a lot of times, it kind of best to set down and talk to them, and try to convince them of what's right and wrong.*

Out of the ten participants, Marvin talked most about being involved with his community. During his enrollment in the literacy program, he

> *was recruiting people that couldn't read and write. That was what I would do. And I also would make trips to different schools to tell childrens about education, to stay in school and get a good education and not drop out. Because, I'd always, I'd let them look back at my history, how I come up. And try to get to them to stay in school and do better than I did. And, but that's what I taught when I was going to school. I would go to different schools and teach that. Teach them that staying in school, get a good education and when you come out you can get a job, a good job. And you won't have to drive tractor or plow mules for a living. So that's what I taught them, so the ones that I did go to. And I've got children come up to me right now where I went, always talk to me about why I stopped out.*

Marvin's life is filled with his grown children, his grandchildren, and his foster children. He is proud of them, and of his own accomplishments, of having "made it" through many hardships including limited literacy.

Ruth

Ruth lives in a small town in Middle Tennessee. She and her husband moved there from North Carolina where Ruth and her six brothers spent their teenage years. Before then, the family lived in the mountain area of Tennessee where Ruth went to school up till the sixth grade. She dropped out of the ninth grade in North Carolina.

> *I wasn't interested in it. I didn't feel like I was learning anything. I didn't know whether it was me or the teachers, or what. They didn't, you know, if you had a problem, they didn't come to you directly, they just kept it at the whole, you know, class. And I didn't feel, I felt like I needed help, you know, singled out, where I can pick up on stuff quicker. They didn't teach like that.*

The two other girls in the family died young:

> *One [sister] before I was born, my brother accidentally shot her, he was playing with the gun, and killed her She was about 14, and he was about nine And my youngest sister, she died the day before she was two, with measles*

Ruth married young and sounded positive describing her marital relationship: *"I do what I want to do and when I want to do it."* Ruth told us that in their family, her husband is usually responsible for the things like paying bills, although she could also do it if she had to. She likes her small town, although she misses her family whom she does not see often. There is not much going on in the town, and in her free time Ruth goes to a bigger town to shop or see a movie, or fishing in a lake with her husband.

They have one daughter who is now married and has two children. Ruth's daughter did not finish high school.

> *She wanted to get married. And she was already in twelfth grade, and she wanted to get married, so she just dropped out and got married. ...Then her husband promised that he'd let her go on, you know, go to school. It didn't happen that way. ...Because he didn't have [a high school diploma], he didn't want her to have it.*

Ruth's daughter attended ABE classes and now she *"lacks one point in her GED."* Ruth hopes that some day she will finish, although her daughter has some health

problems:

> *She stays home, takes care of her baby. She started taking to epileptical seizures, I think about ten months ago. She used to work in the nursing home... She started taking those seizures and quit.*

Both Ruth and her husband had major surgeries. Ruth remembers vividly the night when her husband had a heart attack:

> *He was at home. It had snowed that day, that night, it was on Thursday night. It had snowed, and it was really bad outside. And he come and woke me up, and told me, "You need to take me to the hospital." Said, "I think I'm having a heart attack." And I looked up and I said, "Can we call an ambulance, I said, it's really bad outside". He said, "No, I want you to drive me down there.". So, it was about one o'clock in the morning.*
> *He said, he was just hurting in his chest, and his left arm, it was really hurting. When I got him to the hospital, they said he's having one. They had a helicopter come from Nashville, and they took him to Vanderbilt Hospital in Nashville.*

Ruth herself had cancer approximately twenty years ago. She recovered, however, and in several years started working at a big chicken plant. She is *clipping feathers. When the birds come down the line, they hang them on their legs, and on the wing, there's feathers on it, and I have to make sure that they are off the bird, or back of the wing or the tail of it, until there is a oil bag on it, I got to clip the whole tail off because they say it's got poison or something in it.*

> *They just keep on going, I mean, constant, they just keep moving.*

The work conditions are very hard, although the jobs has benefits.

> *The benefits are good, it's just we have to work in cold all day. They say they have to keep it the certain temperature down there, you know. I think they try to freeze us sometime.*
> *I wear about two or three sweaters to work. And they got plastic sleeves where you can put on your arms to keep your sleeves, you know, down. You don't wear them, you got to roll your sleeves up.*

The production line sometimes *"runs about 90 to 97 birds a minute"* Ruth now has *"spurs in my neck and in my shoulder ...[it] I think, has to do with doing that all day, all swelling in my fingers, this is from scissors."* Some day Ruth hopes to have a better job, *"in the place like [the local plant manufacturing transmissions*

for cars]. Or bookkeeping, ...I'd like to try that."

All of the jobs Ruth considers attractive require a GED. Ruth is trying to get hers going to night basic education classes. She has been doing that for *"about four-five years now."* In winter, however, she gets so cold at her work that she does not like to go out again at night, and because of that attends the classes only during the warmer time of year. She hopes to pass it in soon. If she has a better paying job, Ruth and her husband might be to move out of the trailer where they lived for many years, to a new home. This is Ruth's dream

Suzanne

Suzanne, a young White woman, was the oldest of three children. Most of her life she and her family lived in a small town in a West Tennessee rural county. Suzanne remembers being unhappy at home as a teenager. When she was telling us about her reasons to drop out of high school, she connected much to her unhappiness at home, her lack of success and interest in school, and her early first marriage:

> *Well, when I was going to school, my grammar school, it was OK, I had a lot of friends and everything, and I was never, I was sort of like a shy person... and I really felt like, you know, I didn't like it. But I did have a few friends, and then I got up in high school. In my ninth grade I failed. So I went on with the ninth grade, and then, me and my first husband, well, we went started going together. And ... he graduated in 83, and I thought, well, I can't live without him, I am going to quit... I mean, I couldn't keep my mind on it, and plus, my home life, when I was at home, before I got married, was not good at all. My mother, she was working 3-4 jobs, and my father, he just, he stayed on prescription medication, he was addicted to that, and didn't have a job, and then my sister, my Mom trying to raise her and send her to school, and then my brother, he was just a, a drunk, an old junkie. I married just to get out of that life, I did. Honestly, I did. I cared for the guy that I was dating and I assumed I thought I loved him. You know, you think that you love somebody but you don't? Well, that's what that was.. And it really did, it got better a little, but we didn't have anything. And ... [my husband] encouraged me to go to school. But I quit at the 10th grade, and I was failing anyway, I couldn't keep my mind on what was going on here at home, and my father mistreating me, and , I thought, "Well, I'm not no good." He's talked about me. My sister, she was getting all those praises and things, and then I'm, well, you know, you don't know where you're going. So I told them, I said, I'm gonna quit. I quit in August and we got married in October, had a baby girl. And he graduated in May, I believe so. I said, well... And when I think back on my old days being at home, and I wish that I never got married so young, stayed in school. But you can't keep your mind on what's happening at home, and being mistreated at home, and things going and try to get education, too. I just couldn't. And my sister, she was always the Miss Thing of everything. Now she lives in [a big city], she works for [a corporation], got a good job.*
>
> *She graduated [from high school]. And my brother, he didn't. He quit, I don't even think he went in high school. If he did, I can't even remember ...*

> *I am the oldest, and my brother, he is 29, and my sister, she is 23. So, she was at home, and I was married and had my own children, and she was always, got everything. You know, I'm proud of her, and everything, but it made me feel like I was nothing.*

One of the accomplishments in Suzanne's life at that time was her battle with being overweight after the birth of her two oldest children.

> *When I first... Yeah, it was a lot of real hard determination. When I got pregnant with my first one, I gained like 230 pounds. Just kept getting bigger on up. I said, "Well, I'm going to lose this weight." So, she put me on a 1000 calories diet in the hospital, the doctor did. When I got out I said, I'm going to put it less than that. I put it down to like 500, even less, drank water. And I fixed full course meals. We're talking about your beans, and your potatoes, and your corn bread, cabbage, all the good country food, big homemade biscuits and stuff. I was eating nothing, you know.... And I said, well, I'm gonna do it so I walked. I walked all the time. I did weights, I did videos, I did aerobics. You name it, I done it. I said, I'm going to lose this weight. So I did. I got it down to size seven, kept it off.*

She exhibited similar determination in her efforts to pass the GED test.

> *And I started adult basic education when, back in 1991, and I quit, and then I realized that I need my GED, and then I started going back and then I started going to night school and then I said., "Well, I'm going to do it." And then I figured, "Well, what I got to lose," so I took the test, and of course I failed it. And I was determined that I needed this and I needed to get a job, and you have to have it to get a job nowadays, so I figured, "Well, I'm gonna do it again," and I did it again. And, of course, I failed again. And everybody was encouraging me and ... I said, well, I'm not going to quit, I was determined because I knew if I could lose- I lost 150 pounds. So, I knew if I could do that and put my mind, I knew that I could do this. So, I did it again, and of course I failed. And I was bound and determined that I was not going to let this overcome me, so I did it again. And I passed it. Barely, but I did it. And I got a good job, in a [manufacturing] company here in [our town].*

However, she did not stay long at this job. The job was hard physically, she had to work the night shift, and had to have arrangements for child care.

> *And the... company, it's a wonderful place to work because it [has] benefits, it's just it's hard....Water hose. You had to wind waterhoses. They are heavy, some are 110 to 200 feet long, and they are heavy. And plus, another thing I didn't really like, is I was on nights. And with 3 children that didn't work very well.*
> *See, I hadn't been there, and, you know, the day shift had already their pick. And I didn't want to go on 11 to 7 because my children, I didn't have no place for them that late at night. And 3 to 11, they were scattered from here, there, ... and then me and [the second husband] wasn't married at the time, so it was very, very hard. And I couldn't meet their standards in production level, and daycare..., so I just, I just give up. You know. Now, I believe, I could do it.*

Suzanne divorced her first husband and married a man who *"I've always was in love with this guy, always. [He] was just everything to me, and then we found each other in '94, and then things happened and we got married in '96."* Soon after her marriage, she resumed her search for a better job:

> *And now I need a job. I recently got married in February of this year, and things... I don't know if they're gonna last or not. And I need a job now. And I just recently filled out an application for a recycling plant they're building here in town. And, hopefully, that I can get a job.*
> *And now I'm home, I sit at home with my three children. My husband, he has three kids, too. Three girls, too. And there's a lot of things happening that I don't know if my marriage is going to last with him, and I need a job. I feel disgusted, discouraged. I have a car out there and [it] needs a motor. I've got another car, he has my car. I'm stuck. I don't know what to do. I'm here, and seems like the more I sit here, the more I don't do nothing... And he's having a lot of problems with his children, child support, and everything and ... I've got to have some kind of income and I've got to have a car. So, you know, I need something, I need-- I feel like it's just all on me, and I just, ...I wish that I could go back to school and further my education, and get a good job, and not having to worry about daycare -- that was my biggest problem, you know -- daycare.*

A year later, during our second interview, Suzanne looked and sounded more content. Earlier in the year, she had found a job that she liked, and, although the employees were laid off for the summer, she hoped to start working there again soon.

> *It's a recycling place. Return distribution specialists. And we care for*

suncare products, ... all the suntanning products. And what we do is they ship, like Wal-Mart will ship them to a certain place as a big warehouse, and it's called "sharing plough [?]." And then they distribute everywhere. And then what we do is we clean it. Like the little price tags, we make sure the light numbers or the expiration dates hasn't went out or anything, and we clean them and put them back in a box, and then we'll ship them out.

This may not have been the job Suzanne anticipated during several years of studying toward the GED. However, Suzanne liked what she was doing and looked forward to go back., even though she named some potential health hazards.

And this place that I am working for, you know, it requires it but they don't really check into it, you know. They don't, they, it had really nothing to do with my GED, it's just a lot of know-how with my hands, and a little common sense. I enjoy it. You know, it was hard. I worked 4 days a week, 10 hours a day... And I really enjoyed that, and it was hard, but wasn't hard, just a lot of standing on a lot of concrete. And lifting boxes, but mainly I had to work with my hands, cleaning the bottles and stuff. And I cleaned with Shelsol, which that's kerosene, unscented kerosene and ArmorAll, to clean the bottles. And, you know, besides that, I enjoyed it. Well, for my personality, I mean, I pretty well like what I am doing now, working for [recycling plant].. I mean, you can talk, but also you got to know what you are doing. I wouldn't want to be in a factory where they, you couldn't, you just had to stand still and not say nothing. You know, and you can learn from different people...

Meanwhile, while she was laid off, Suzanne has been helping her husband who, besides his full-time factory job, worked part-time as a brick layer. This became her major learning project and she was very proud of her accomplishments.

Like we leave in the mornings around 7:30, and basically we get home between twelve and one. And then he gets rest and then I take him to work close to three. And so he works two jobs, and then back when August starts, I want to go back to work. I won't be helping, this is just like little side-work that he is doing. See, he was a brick-mason, so, and now he works there at the... company.
It is a lot to remember. Because to him it comes to him [snaps her fingers], because he's been doing it so many years. Me, I want to do it to help him. Because if we get on big jobs like 1400 brick, and he can't do it

> *all day because he has to go to a job at night. So, it takes so many hours, like 5 hours in the day. So he needs help bringing the mortar to him, the brick to him. And if I wasn't helping him, he'd have to pay somebody to help him, and there goes our profit. And I want our money, you know, me helping him. Now, of course, more time, time.... It pays good. But I can learn how to lay the brick. You know, time will tell, I'll be able to do it.*

The husband's full-time factory work provides the family with benefits which Suzanne employer doesn't have. *"He just been there a little over four months, so he passed his probation. He's got insurance on me and his 2 other daughters, and he gets eye, dental."* Suzanne's own children are covered by their father's medical insurance. Nevertheless, Suzanne's relationship with her ex-husband is strained.

> *I am going to take him back to court for more child support. He's saying that he don't owe it, but I know he does, and the lawyer says he does... Because after the insurance pays, we are supposed to split it, and he don't want to do that, he don't want to spend no more money. But he just took a trip to Florida, he just, he's got a '97 JT Mustang, they are adding on to their home, so... But he don't want his daughter have glasses or her mouth fixed. And he called me last night, and got me so upset, and told me he is going to take them away from me,... and it really hurt me.*

Besides that, Suzanne has other worries about her daughters that have to do with their safety. She believes that even in their small town there are problems with

> *drive-by shooting, drugs. Yeah, there is two or three streets here in [town] that I wouldn't dare go up on myself. I wouldn't drive up...Because the kids know the streets by name, and they, you know.*
> *Around here [in our street], you don't really hear of anything. I mean, I just stay, we just stay right back here in our little house and really nothing ever goes on.*

Suzanne is involved in her children's schooling.

> *Well, my oldest daughter, she's smart she's made honor roll since she was in kindergarten, and she's in the seventh grade. She got a scholarship somewhere, the best achievement honor roll, and she made the newspaper and everything, and they printed her in the yearbook, And they are going to send a whole bunch of papers for me to fill out, and everything. And she was very honored that they just picked her. And I was so honored, that she's doing so well. And she's going to be band, she wants to be a*

> *cheerleader. And my middle child, she's just like me. She failed her third grade, she's gonna repeat it. Maria is slow. It takes her longer to comprehend things than it does Leigh Anne. Leigh Anne catches on just like that, of course, Leigh Anne is twelve, and Maria will be ten. Maria is slow. In her talking, you can tell things that just not right. She is not dumb, she is a bright little girl, but when it comes to school she may read one sentence and go back five minutes later, she don't even know what she read. And I have all kinds of conferences with them over the phone, went to school, and I even suggested to put her in a special group, maybe helping her, that's what I want for her, is help.*

The youngest daughter, to whom Suzanne read even she still was pregnant with her, attends daycare and is learning

> *her numbers, all her ABC's, colors, anything... And then when she gets in kindergarten, she'll know practically everything, so I'm proud of her, and I'm proud of all 3 of my kids, I really am, and they are the love of my life.*

Suzanne's life is centered around her family, and she is striving to secure a better future for herself and her children.

Will

Will, a man in his fifties, was born in rural East Tennessee, and lived on a farm for many years.

> *We raised tobacco, that was our main thing. We raised cattle but we sold stock, you know, and raised hogs, sold them. And raised the biggest part of the stuff we eat. But now, farming, it's just fading away. I mean, it's a shame, you know, that farmers don't, the farmers has a rough time. I mean, they just rob them, you know, from their crops lot of times.*

Will's parents had five boys and a girl. The sister was the only one who graduated from high school. Will himself never went to high school. He dropped out of the eighth grade because he wanted to go to work.

> *I growed up in this area, little farm over there we had... Back when I was just about 10-11 years old, we lived down in Florida for a part of two years. And Dad was on the job down there. Other than that, I've been in this part of the country, I've worked in this county since I was old enough to work.*
> *Somewhere along 15-16, I ... started working on farm till I was old enough to go to public work. Of course, we had a farm I worked on. And then, I worked at service stations, farms, helping people... And then when I was old enough to work, they'd hire me in a place, I worked for a chair company.*

After that, Will had several factory jobs.

> *At the stove works, well I worked there most of my life. But I worked on assembly line down there eight years one time, than I worked three years again in the same job, and then I went back and worked 18 years, and that was in the maintenance on the lift trucks. And the last year I was there I ran the waste water plant.*

After 18 years of work in one place, he decided to apply for a better paying job and was hired. However, a few days later he was told that since he did not have a high school diploma, he could not have the job.

> *This place called me to go to work for them and I went in for an interview, went and talked to them, and then went in for another interview, and they told me the story, you know, and everything and they did want me to go to*

> *work. And after I was hired and everything, done turned in a notice on my job, well they said they couldn't use me because I didn't have a high school education or the GED. So, it just went from that and they tried to fix it but it didn't work... But you know, there wasn't any education discussed, or even an application.*

This was a heavy blow for someone who valued worked and had been employed for most of his life (Will also had some part-time jobs on the side during most of his life).

> *And then I went to the unemployment office and they told me that I could draw unemployment in the state of Tennessee for, you know, a reason that was good. And, of course, they denied it but we had a hearing, and I drawed six months or so.*

During these six months Will attended adult basic education classes. He was feeling "down" at the time and appreciated teachers' support and caring attitude.

> *And after all the years of working, and you just, I mean, you get up one morning and you don't have a job, and it did, it hit me hard. And that, to start with, I would get that on my mind, get down there, and get thinking about this, you know. And when you go [to class] with something like that on your mind, forget it. So I said, "Hey this is got to go, I've got to wipe this out of my mind, and get in here and do what I come here for." And did, you know. So, it ... well, [the teachers] helped a lot down there, too. I mean they knew that I, the kind of pressure that I was under, and people just coming up and talking to you, and they knew what to say and all this. They, I give them a lot of credit for that.*

Will's family was also supportive during that difficult time. He described his marriage as solid and based on mutual respect. His wife, a high school graduate, has been working at another local factory for 32 years. Will and his wife are both looking forward to the retirement as "time to themselves," although neither is in a hurry to retire.

> *She works in the shipping. She deals with these truck drivers all the time. She's done got a retirement, 30 year retirement, but the longer you work, the better your retirement is. And she said, I told her, I said, 'Hey, I said, if there is any way when I become 62 years old which is 10 years', I told her, she said 'They ain't no way you are going to quit working, and I am going to work'. So, we hope, with everything and our health holds up good and*

everything, I'd like to work till she can retire too. And then we can, maybe, sit back and take it easy for a little while.

Their son and daughter have both graduated from high school. The daughter is now a student at a state four-year institution, and Will is very proud of her.

She is the one that wants most to stay in the books, I mean, she'll come home on the weekends and she'll sit up all night long, you know, a lot of times, till way up in the morning. And working on her books and stuff, which I am proud.
I don't regret a dime, you know, that I spend on her education. Because it will pay off in the end.

Will's son graduated from high school but he did not go to college. He is working at a local factory now, a place that requires a high school diploma and pays well. All Will's brothers, except one, who is disabled, also work in manufacturing, and only one still does little farming. All the brothers are musical: Will himself sings and plays guitar in church. Church is an important part in Will's life, and he's been very active when the congregation decided to fix up an old church building.

Oh man, I loved it. It's the old church building, well we wanted to leave the outside like it was and fix the inside, and we put electric heat in it.

Between his work, family, church, and hobbies, Will does not have time to go back to adult education classes and try to prepare for the GED test, although his family would like him to and he is still thinking about it. He is happy with his new job, his family, and his life as it is now.

NCSALL

National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

The Mission of NCSALL

The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) will pursue basic and applied research in the field of adult basic education, build partnerships between researchers and practitioners, disseminate research and best practices to practitioners, scholars and policymakers, and work with the field to develop a comprehensive research agenda.

NCSALL is a collaborative effort between the Harvard Graduate School of Education and World Education. The Center for Literacy Studies at The University of Tennessee, Rutgers University, and Portland State University are NCSALL's partners. NCSALL is funded by the U.S. Department of Education through its Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) and OERI's National Institute for Postsecondary Education, Libraries, and Lifelong Learning.

NCSALL's Research Projects

The goal of NCSALL's research is to provide information that is used to improve practice in programs that offer adult basic education, English to Speakers of Other Languages, and adult secondary education services. In pursuit of this goal, NCSALL has undertaken research projects in four areas: (1) learner motivation, (2) classroom practice and the teaching/learning interaction, (3) staff development, and (4) assessment.

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